

RISING UP AND RISING DOWN
WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN

VOLUME V

STUDIES IN CONSEQUENCES

SOUTHEAST ASIA

EUROPE

AFRICA



RISING UP
AND
RISING DOWN

VOLUME FIVE

WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN



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PART II
STUDIES IN
CONSEQUENCES



NOTE ON INCONSISTENCIES

You will find minor stylistic differences in the case studies. For instance, some chapters, such as "The War Never Came Here," deny themselves the convenience of quotation marks in direct speech. This so-called innovation, which I have employed in my novels for some years now, was a source of some distress to my patient editor, Mr. Horowitz. Other chapters show the influence of market pressure. For instance, the Somalia essay was handwritten in Nairobi, in a composition book which I bought in a little pharmacy. I then sent it by courier express to *Esquire* magazine. Because I would be out of reach of copy-editors, I inserted quotation marks for clarity. Should I have standardized these inconsistencies? I recall Lawrence of Arabia's comments to the proofreader who warned him that he had spelled the name of his favorite camel every which way in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence replied simply, "She was a splendid beast."



SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Skulls on the Shelves (1991, 1996)

The Last Generation (1996)

Kickin' It (2000)

I'm Especially Interested in *Young* Girls (1993)

But What Are We To Do? (1994)

Yakuza Lives (1998)



INTRODUCTION

Need I explain why it is that in a book that purports to help people judge excuses for violence, the case studies are accompanied by introductions only, not conclusions? The main reason, of course, is that I don't trust my knowledge and competence to apply my own calculus, which like all human productions must be awfully flawed anyway. If I reject the calculus of conquest in Deuteronomy,¹ how dare I hold up my own moral calculus for your dismissal—especially when I admit that it could be better applied by those who know more facts than I, and differently applied by those who weigh any justification more or less heavily than I? Of course in my own second-rate world of armchair declamations, I get as opinionated as the next hindsighted or wall-eyed prophet. *I* know who's right and wrong in Colombia, and I'll tell you—if I can only trust you not to embarrass me with the shoddiness of my ideals and arguments.² But I try not to put my foot in my mouth on the subject of southeast Asia, where Buddhism blunts the edges of right and wrong, and tradition devalues *Rising Up and Rising Down's* presuppositions—in particular, the rights of the self, on which my requirement that legitimate authority be consensual are founded.

Khmer Rouge Cambodia, considered in "The Skulls on the Shelves," did derive from the European tradition of Marxism, but took the long way around, reinterpreting itself through and receiving moral support from Mao's China. Remember, it was Mao who said that half of his population, or 300 million, would be an accept-

able price to pay in a decisive war against the capitalist world.³ No matter what, my moral calculus will never be fair to southeast Asia on its own terms; I will never “understand” this region as I do my own. All the same, Pol Pot’s new order can be judged quite easily by almost any moral calculus. The rights of self, creed, class, culture—you needn’t seek them here! (Rule Number One on the blackboard at the Tuol Sleng torture-murder center: *It is absolutely forbidden to speak.*)

Rising Up and Rising Down insists that given the almost unlimited license it temporarily seizes, revolutionary authority in particular bears a terrible burden of proving the justifiability of its ends and means.⁴ “The Skulls on the Shelves,” which was researched in 1991 and 1996, is less of an attempt to define the already glaringly definable moral issues of the Cambodian situation than to meditate upon the human how and why of a *limiting case*, by which I mean a point at the practical end of a moral continuum. What Pol Pot did bears comparison with what Hitler did. Mao to the Khmer Rouge: “You, comrades, have won an amazing victory. You have gotten rid of all classes at one blow!” Hence the skulls on the shelves, the skulls stinking and yellow (almost nine thousand of them at Choeung Ek Killing Field alone). If you are a moral relativist, I urge you to study these murderers’ example and then rethink your position. “The Skulls on the Shelves” proves that anybody who thinks and cares about the world bears an urgent necessity to construct a moral calculus.

The brother of my friend Vanny was tortured to death at Tuol Sleng, now a “genocide museum” where Vanny sought his face amidst the crowds of wall-photographs of tortured faces. I asked her what she would want me to demand of Pol Pot, and she replied, “Just I want to know why. Why he kill the people when he is Cambodian like them.” This case study suggests several possible answers to that question. None of them are good enough to justify the skulls on the shelves. *An unjust means or an unjust end equally invalidates all derivative moral enactments.*⁵

So Cambodia became hell, and Cambodians fled when they could. What then? “The Last Generation,” set in southern California in 1996, raises issues of imminent self-defense, and particularly defense of race and culture. Most Cambodians are rural people; frequently they’re illiterate. The lucky few who escaped the camps in Thailand to arrive in the United States came to rest in a predictable niche: the inner city. In the schools their children encountered black and Latino gangs who invoked defense of ground and racial self-defense to attack them. Hence the eighth-grader who was attacked by “Mexicans” with screwdrivers: “I didn’t know them,” he said. “They didn’t know me.” As you read this story, ask yourself what you would have done if you were a Cambodian schoolchild with no one to protect you from such violence. Why do gangs spring into being? This case study tells why. And, as you will have seen in “The Skulls on the Shelves,” Cambodia itself is rife with robbery and warlordism, starving soldiers deserting on both sides, men gunfighting over a fish in the market, vendors kidnapped by royalists or Khmer Rouge for a little money. Where would this eighth-grader or his mother have ever witnessed an incumbent,

potent, legitimate centralized authority?⁶ Not in the USA. The President of the United States, the principal of the high school, the teachers who failed to preserve him from harm in the institution where they ostensibly exemplified and led—what kind of leaders were any of these? A Cambodian mother: “My boy, he get beat so many times by Mexicans. Teacher they can’t do nothing. They don’t want to do nothing. Sometimes American way is not so good.”

Would you abolish gangs if you could? Then you must figure out what you would have done in that boy’s place when the “Mexicans” came after you. Or else you must conceptualize some interventionist protective authority that can save children from being attacked with screwdrivers. When is violent defense of race and culture justified? Certainly it is when the racism of others imminently requires self-defense.⁷

When racial self-defense continues without end, institutionalizing itself into an attribute of race and culture itself, then the next chapter of the story begins. Set in the decidedly unwealthy city of Stockton, California in 2000, the case study “Kickin’ It” looks in upon two gangs whose memberships are primarily Cambodian; in defense of honor and defense of gangland culture they fight each other. In the undying words of a certain Mr. Scarface, “All here, all the Asian people have Asian enemies. Why we gonna make enemies with the other races?”

And if this weren’t strange enough, these gangbangers copy and idolize black gang culture more than their own. Why? Because in their view, blacks know the most and have suffered the most in ghetto America. Overlooked aliens, children of people who literally can’t speak the language of the new country, with nothing to look forward to but menial drudgery at best, these Cambodian teenagers go for what they can go for: gang pride. “Well,” said one young man, “I felt like I was strong ’cause I had friends. It made me more of a man since people were more afraid of me. I remember one guy in my class who tried to fight with me, but then he learned I was kicking with a gang.” Is someone who thinks in this way exercising the fundamental right of any self or group to express its identity,⁸ or has violence merely forced him into the conformity of counter-violence? What is manhood, and can it justify or be justified by Cambodian ganghood? If the soldier in Cambodia who extorts a fish with his machine gun is justified by desperate hunger, is the friendless young Cambodian in an alien country justified in making gang friends to be strong?

In Burma, or at least in Burma’s rebellious province of Shan State, such disempowered individuals might have joined the private army of Khun Sa, better known as the Opium King. Meeting this eerie, charismatic figure in 1994 was one of my greatest experiences as a journalist. In defense of race, homeland and culture, he sold a substantial proportion of the world’s heroin (the Cambodians in “Kickin’ It” sold street drugs to make pocket change). I have never been able to refute Khun Sa’s words: “I do sympathize with the addicts, but also with the growers and traders. Not just one group, but three.”

When the Burmese rape your sister and burn your village and you have no way of

making a living but selling opium, what are you to do? Hence the title of this case study: "But What Are We To do?" This is what they always asked me in Shan State, and I never had an answer. When Khun Sa employs the profits of his heroin trade to defend your zone with his private army, what will you say against him? If he keeps any portion of those profits for himself, does that render him less justified? What constitutes imminent self-defense? Does defense of homeland allow the Shan tribes to secede from a Burmese federation in which they never wished to remain? Khun Sa's said: "This is legally our country. According to the Panglong Accord⁹ we should have been independent more than thirty years ago."

Rising Up and Rising Down's moral calculus proposes that defense of homeland is justified *when the aliens, the people from outside the homeland, are the imminent violent aggressors*.¹⁰ Are the Burmese aliens in Shan State, or are the Shan breakaway renegades? The American Civil War¹¹ and the Yugoslavian Civil War¹² posed their own versions of this question. Who defines homeland? What equilibrium would you propose between authority and liberty? What are the rights of a sovereign state, and what if they conflict with the rights of an ethnic minority? Should Burma, or Yugoslavia, allow its own dissolution down to the subatomic level? Or must the Shan, the Karenni and other insurgent minorities abandon their own dreams? What else could or should the Shan people have done?

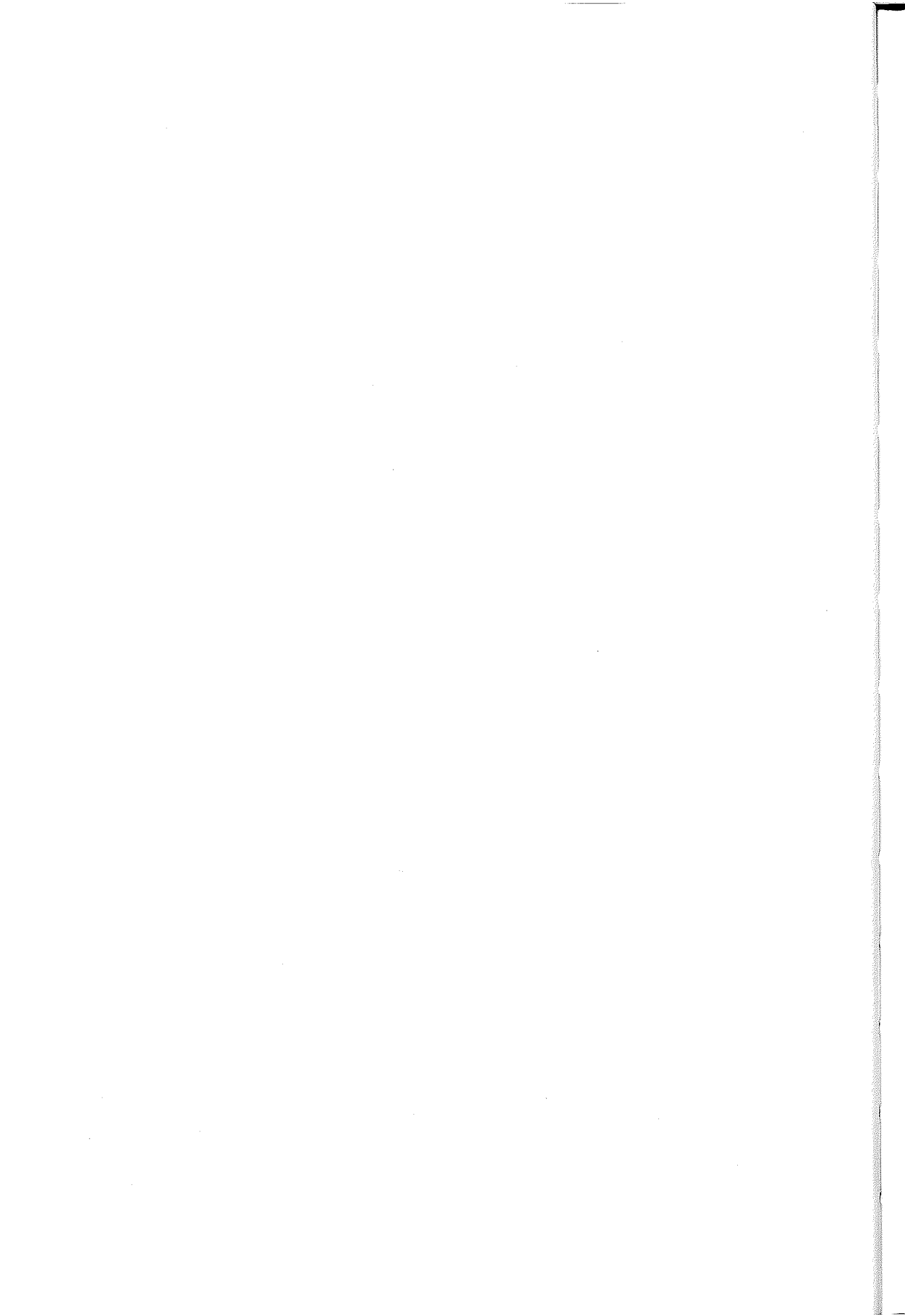
"Yakuza Lives" (1998) deals with the "Japanese Mafia," the Yakuza. This case study bears obvious comparison with "The Last Generation" and "Kickin' It." The ethical questions, the violence-justifications, are similar. However, the American gangs described in the latter two studies are ad hoc organizations whose traditions, such as they are, go back only a few years, and whose members remain powerless to influence more than a few square blocks of their own neighborhoods; whereas men who enter the Yakuza may stay in it for life, with all the adult employments of corporate extortion, money laundering, strikebreaking, "protection," prostitution clubs, etcetera; furthermore, Yakuza claim an indefinitely longstanding presence in Japan, and indeed, even now the police afford them a certain respect and tolerance; they're rightwing superpatriots, defenders of this and that, Robin Hoods (in their own minds, at least). And the fact that they continue to insist on this image of themselves with such conviction casts a hint of doubt on other claimants to that role, such as Khun Sa. "What we do is help the weak," said one very powerful and frightening man. "And if the weak are so appreciative and bring money, then we refuse to receive it unless they insist."

These heroes are also well instructed in the finer points of deterrence, retribution, revenge and defense against traitors. "My policy for living in this organization is to throw myself away," one Yakuza informs us. "The organization is always first. This is my belief. I must always come second." Put this way, it sounds almost beautiful.

Finally,¹³ "I'm Especially Interested in *Young Girls*" is set in Thailand in 1993. It deals with prostitution, particularly child prostitution. Although this case study is,

in effect, a confession about a kidnapping I committed, I'm not sure that what I did was violence. If it were, I still would be proud of it. When is violent defense of gender justified? For one thing, when its cause lies open to all—in other words, when its purpose is to defend the possession of rights which ought to be applied irrespective of gender.¹⁴ That little girl was sold against her will, locked up, and essentially raped for profit. This chapter really belongs in *Rising Up and Rising Down* on account of the very fundamental issues it raises regarding consensuality and the rights of the self. The fact that her slavery was sexual, gender-associated, is in my opinion irrelevant to imminent self-defense. But violent defense of gender is also justified when it seeks by otherwise justified means to stop an attempt to violently transform gender into, or violently maintain it as, class.¹⁵ Would you agree with me that nonconsensual prostitution constitutes precisely such an unwarranted violent attempt?

Meanwhile, the ethos of southeast Asia shimmers weirdly over all this; prostitutes clasp their hands and bow to Buddha when they get a nice customer; beggars *wai* in the same fashion; people tend to submit to their destiny. When is submission justified? What does the child owe the parent? By the Confucianist creed, everything. If, as in this case, the parent sells her in order to get a new roof for his house, by his creed and hers is she entitled to complain at all? You think so, and I do, too. But how much right do we possess to interfere with an alien society? Speaking strictly for myself, I would do what I did again. But, also speaking for myself, I dislike missionaries; I'm outraged by the harm they've wreaked on native societies down the centuries. A seventeenth-century French Jesuit would have happily undermined tribal authority and religion among the Huron Indians, because he was certain that in so doing he was saving their souls. I am not so sure that he was. When I prevent a cat from killing a bird, or when I rescue a child prostitute, how certain will my own certainties remain to "posterity" five hundred years from now?



CAMBODIA AND CAMBODIAN AMERICA

1996-2000

These three photo-essays depict the Khmer Rouge regime after the fact, by portraying a few of the Khmer Rouge extermination facilities in Cambodia, and a Khmer Rouge defector on the Thai border. (See the case study "The Skulls on the Shelves.") We also get a glimpse of a K.R. base, these pictures being taken for me by the insurgents themselves with a disposable camera. Following this, we observe the poverty and agony of Cambodia transmuted into gangsterism in California. That gangsterism, at first defensive (see the case study "The Last Generation") rapidly becomes imitative, even assimilationist ("Kickin' It").

I.

23. Painting by a survivor, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (Phnom Penh, Cambodia): a Khmer Rouge cadre slits a prisoner's throat.
24. Closeup of a Khmer Rouge defector, Aranyaprathet, Thailand, 1996. Khmer Rouge uniforms were readily available secondhand at that time. I asked him to dress as he used to dress among the K.R., and this is the result. Note the similarity between his getup and that of the cadre in the painting (previous photo). The pistol he borrowed from an indulgently smiling Thai policeman. He is hiding his face so that the K.R. won't kill his mother.
25. Photograph on the wall at Tuol Sleng: a tortured boy, not yet murdered.
26. The skulls on the shelves, Choeung Ek killing field, not far from Phnom Penh.
27. Commemorative marker for thousand-person mass grave, Choeung Ek.

28. Bust of Pol Pot at Tuol Sleng. The few survivors of this facility earned their rights to life by sculpting busts of Pol Pot. This particular miniature monument has been defaced with an "X."
- 29a. A bedframe used for torture at Tuol Sleng. Here the prisoners received electric shocks. When I first visited Tuol Sleng, there were still black bloodstains under these beds. By the time I came here with my camera, the blood had been removed. My friend Vanny, whose brother was murdered here, told me that when the Vietnamese "liberators" first compelled her to see Tuol Sleng, each bed contained a decomposing corpse.
- 29b. Photographs on the wall of Tuol Sleng: Tortured victims of the Khmer Rouge.
- 30a. Vanny looking at these wall photographs. This was her second visit to Tuol Sleng, and it would almost certainly be her last. She came only to help me. She could not prevent herself from searching for an image of her brother.
- 30b. A wall photograph at Tuol Sleng.
- 31a. The skulls on the shelves, Choeung Ek.
- 31b-32a. Active Khmer Rouge cadres at their base in Cambodia near the Thai border. I made contact with these individuals through an intermediary on the Thai side. They refused to allow me to cross the border, asserting (plausibly) that this was for my safety and theirs, so I bought a disposable camera, paid them to take a few pictures "inside," and developed the film in Aranyaprathet. As you see, these men were very concerned about hiding their faces. From the banana magazine, I would deduce that the cadre on p. 26 is holding an "Ah Ka," a Kalashnikov. From a color negative.
- 32b. This photograph, which I bought fair and square from a Thai "police general," depicts a battle-slain K.R. lying in the grass clutching his weapon. At this time (1996) such sights were still fairly common. I was initially surprised that it was a part of the "police general's" duties to make frequent inspection trips into battlefields in another country. This cadre was killed by royalists ("Whites"). There is a good probability that he operated from the base which his colleagues photographed for me on pages 25 (lower) and 26 (upper).

II.

- 33-34b. The Crazy Ruthless Kings, a Cambodian "tagger" gang. When I encountered them, this group did not appear on the master list kept by the Long Beach Police Department's Gang Suppression Unit.

III.

35. San's mother, Manchester housing project. She loved her son very much and was sad that she could not control him. Like many Cambodians of her generation, she could not speak English. (She and he both discussed in the case study "Kickin' It.") Manchester is a "red block," an area dominated by the Blood confederacy of gangs.
36. A home in the rival "blue block" (Crip gang affiliates) of Kentfield. This is how these children wanted to pose for the camera. As you see, they are already making "cool" gestures which resemble gang signs.
- 37-38a. Kentfield. These childrens' gang signs are undeniable.
- 38b. Manchester graffiti: "HMUNG LOVE." The Hmong are a hill tribe dispersed through Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. As a result of their assistance to the U.S. counter-insurgency effort during the Vietnam War, many were endangered by the Communist victory, and the U.S. admitted considerable numbers as refugees. At Manchester and Kentfield, the gangs were equally welcoming. Hmong and Laotians were outnumbered by Cambodians at both housing projects. A Kentfield Crip. The bandana around his right wrist conceals a bullet scar.
39. Manchester. San and his homeboys.
40. A Kentfield Crip. The bandana around his right wrist conceals a bullet scar.
41. Another Kentfield gangster.
42. An O.G. (old gangster) near Manchester.
43. A Laotian gangster in Kentfield.
44. Kentfield by day.
45. Kentfield by night.
46. Two girls from Manchester who invited me to date them. To quote Scarface from Kentfield, "To get a

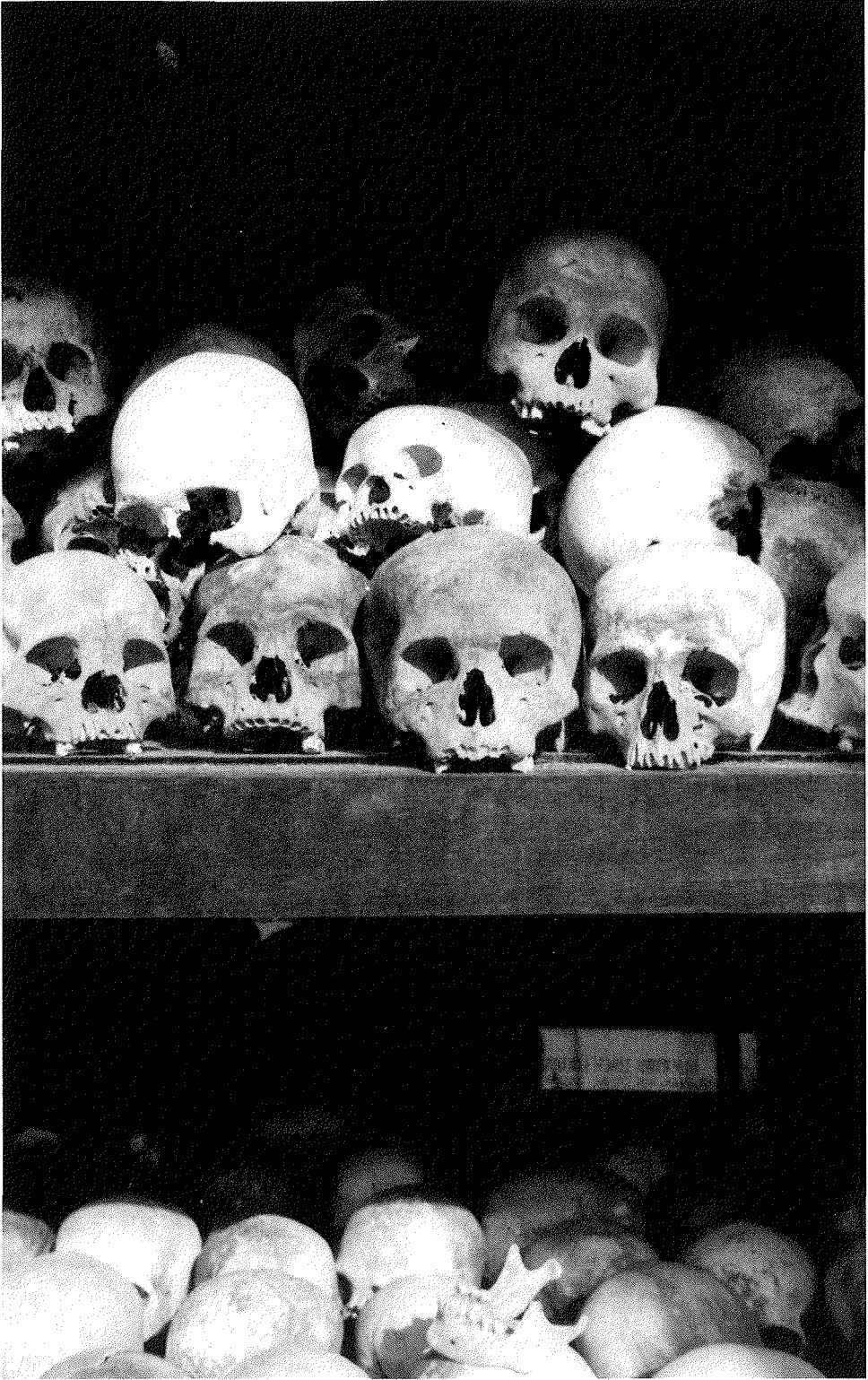
decent girl's more difficult, but to get a hood rat's more cool."

47. A boy in Kentfield proudly shows off his bullet scar.
48. The sister of LeJohn "Bert" Tobler, who was shot (I think here at Kentfield), shows the program from his memorial service. He and she were not Cambodian.
- 49a-49b. San's room, Manchester. There is quite a contrast between what he likes to display on his walls and what his mother chooses for the living room (p. 29). The girl in the upper photo is Sara. She wanted to be his steady girl, his "homey loverfriend." San told me, jokingly or not, that she was only his "bed buddy," his regular sexual partner. When these pictures were taken, San was "on ankle" for a home invasion he'd committed. Hence the alarm bracelet on his right ankle.
- 50a. The limits of San's freedom. Part of the door to the living room appears to the lower right. San could not go downstairs to the courtyard; otherwise the alarm would have sounded.
- 50b. One of San's friends in the same spot, by night. San was busy with Sara at the moment.



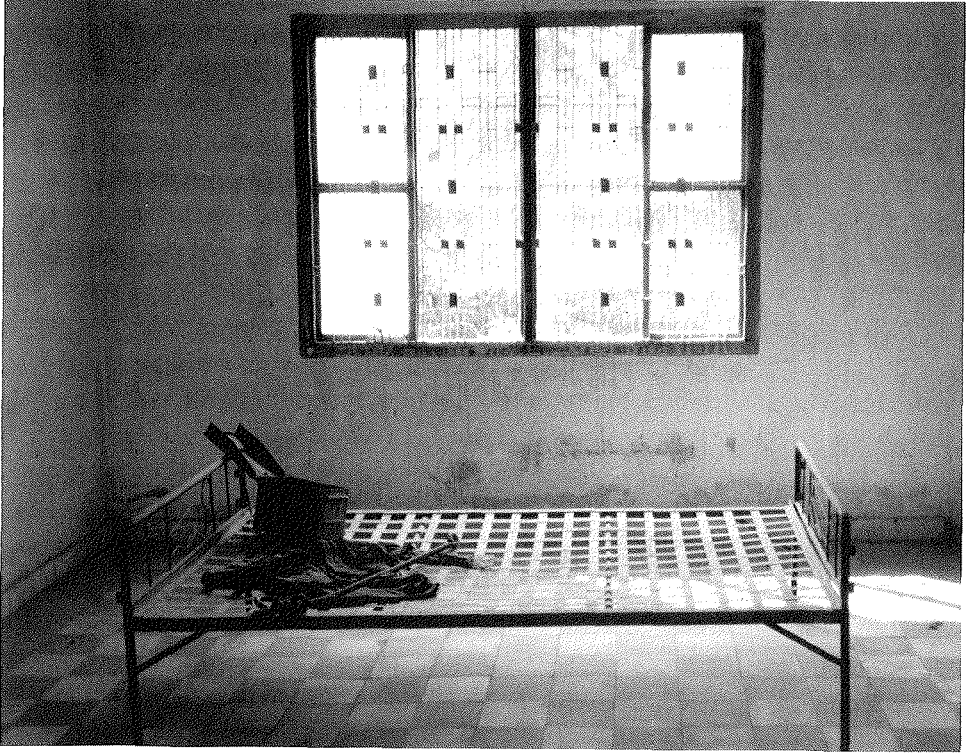


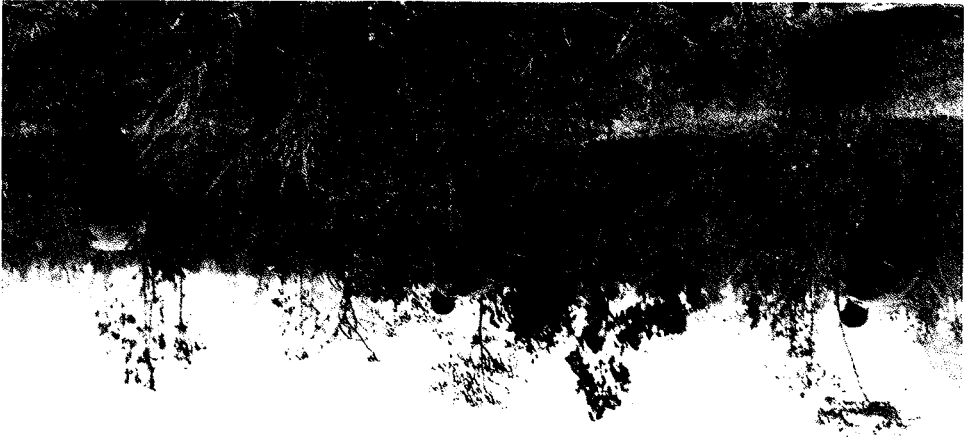


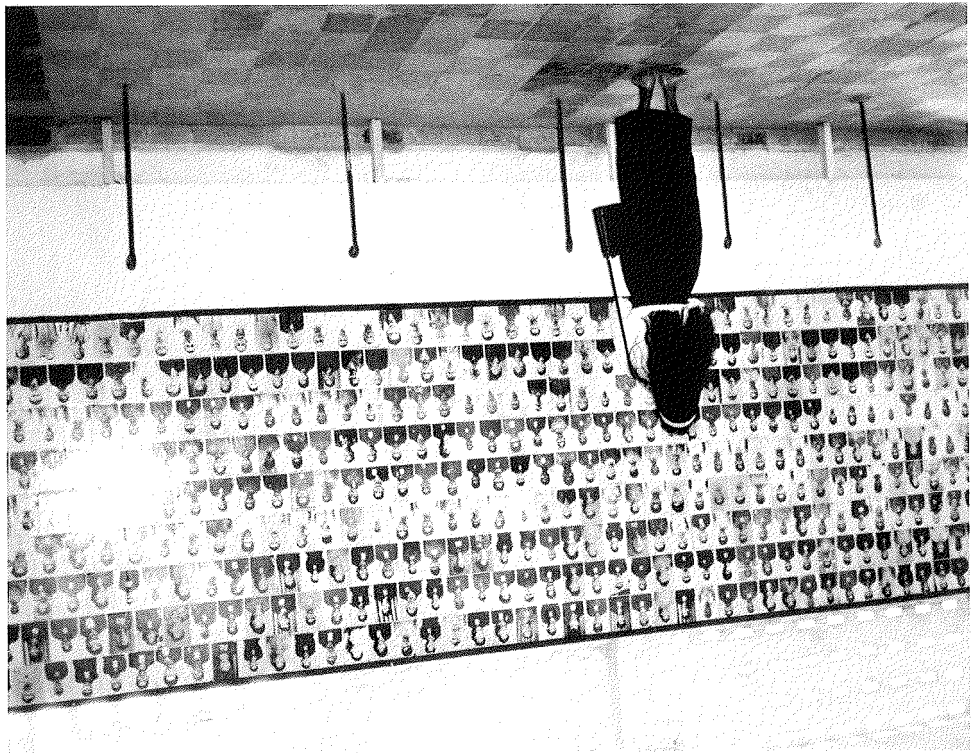


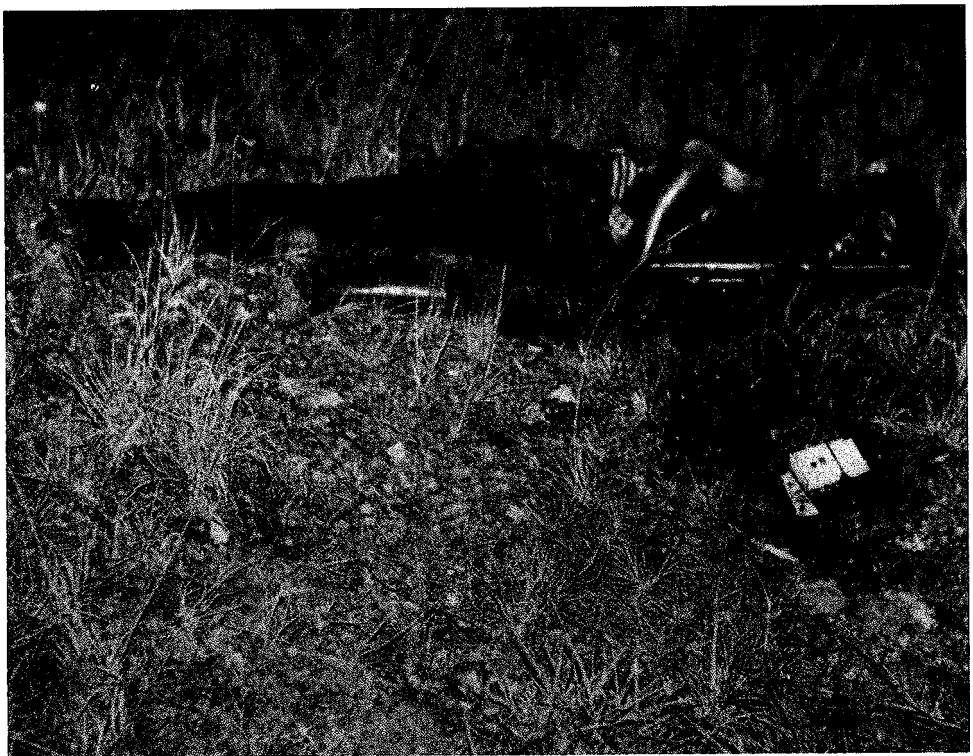








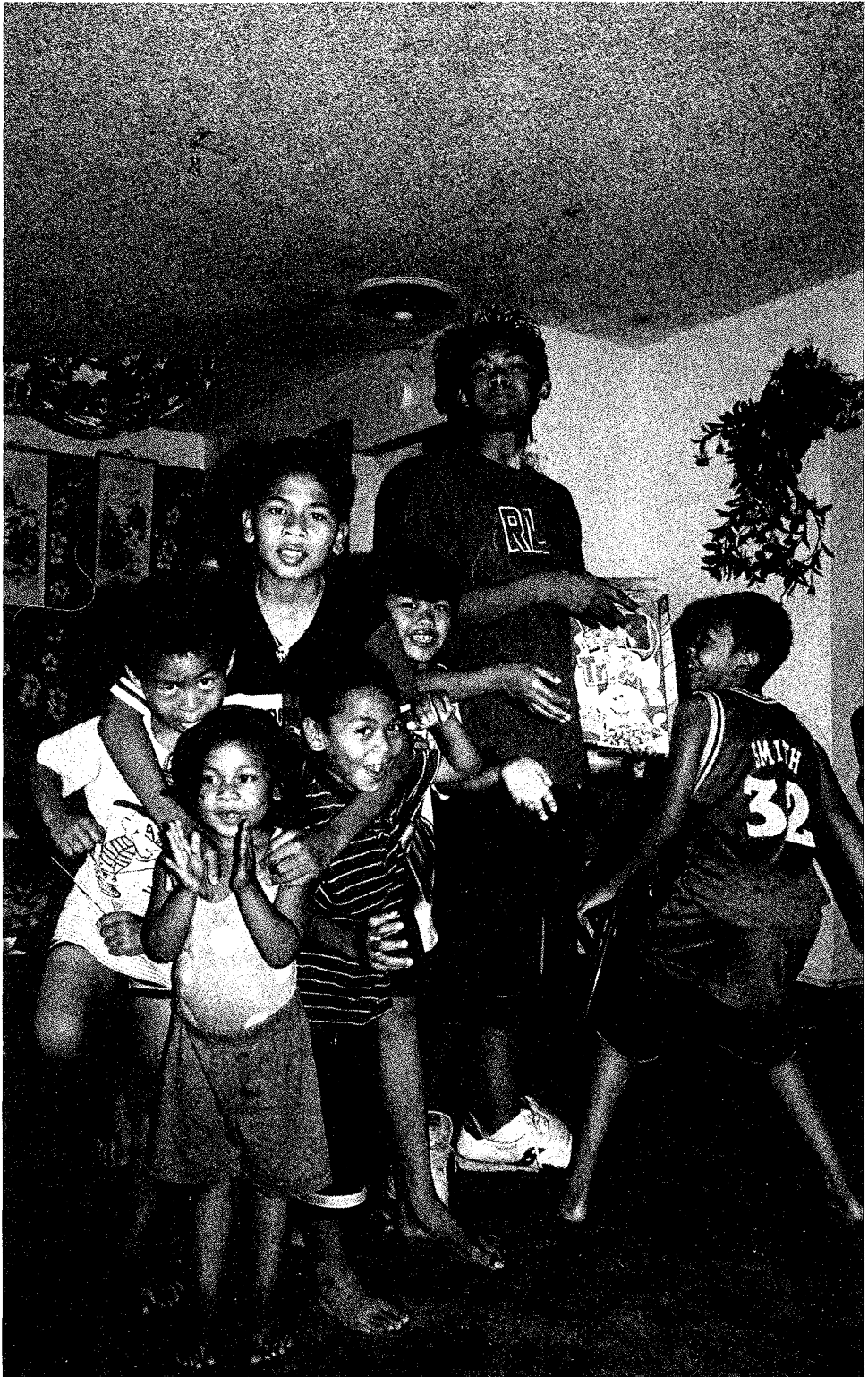








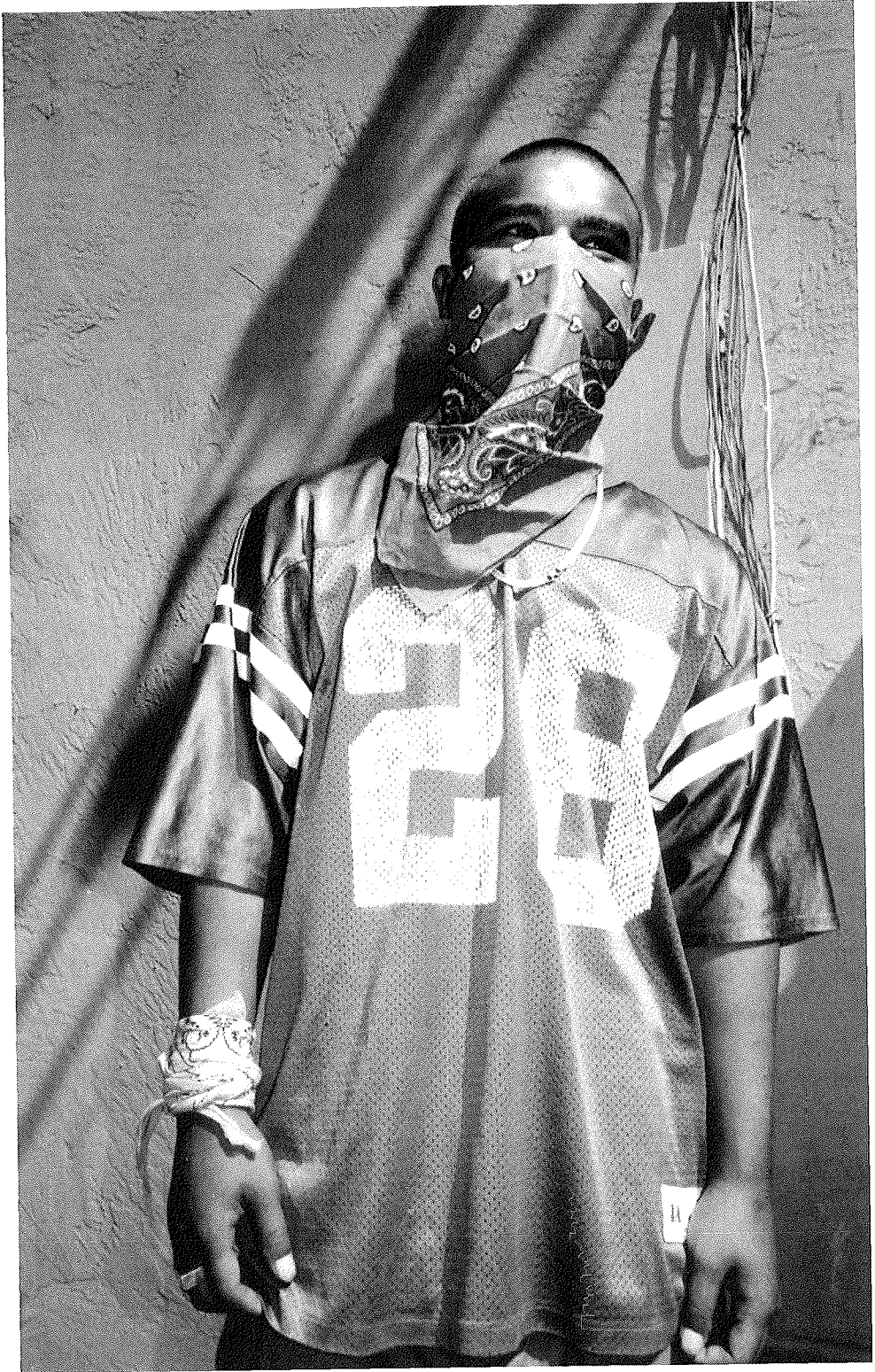




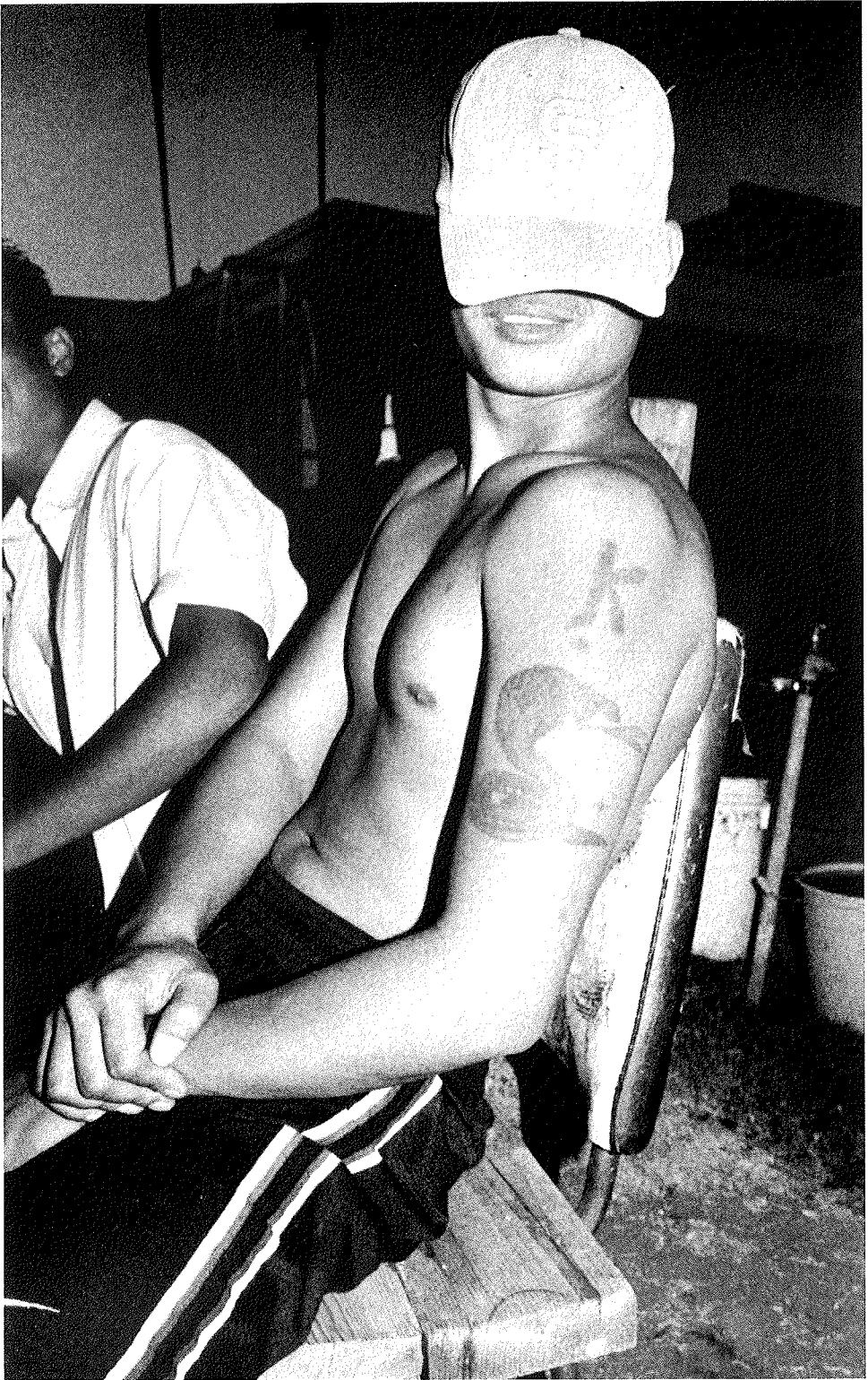


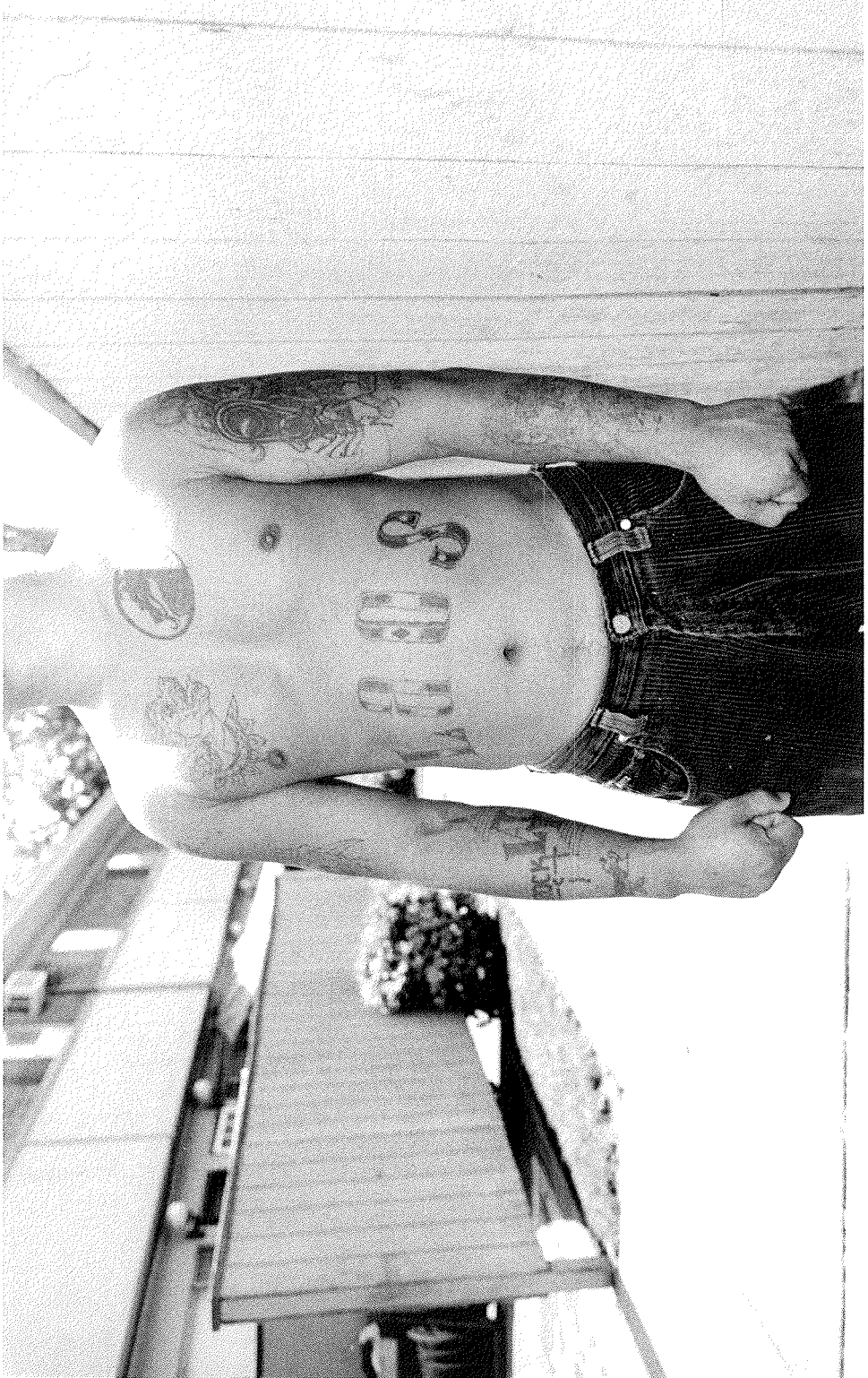




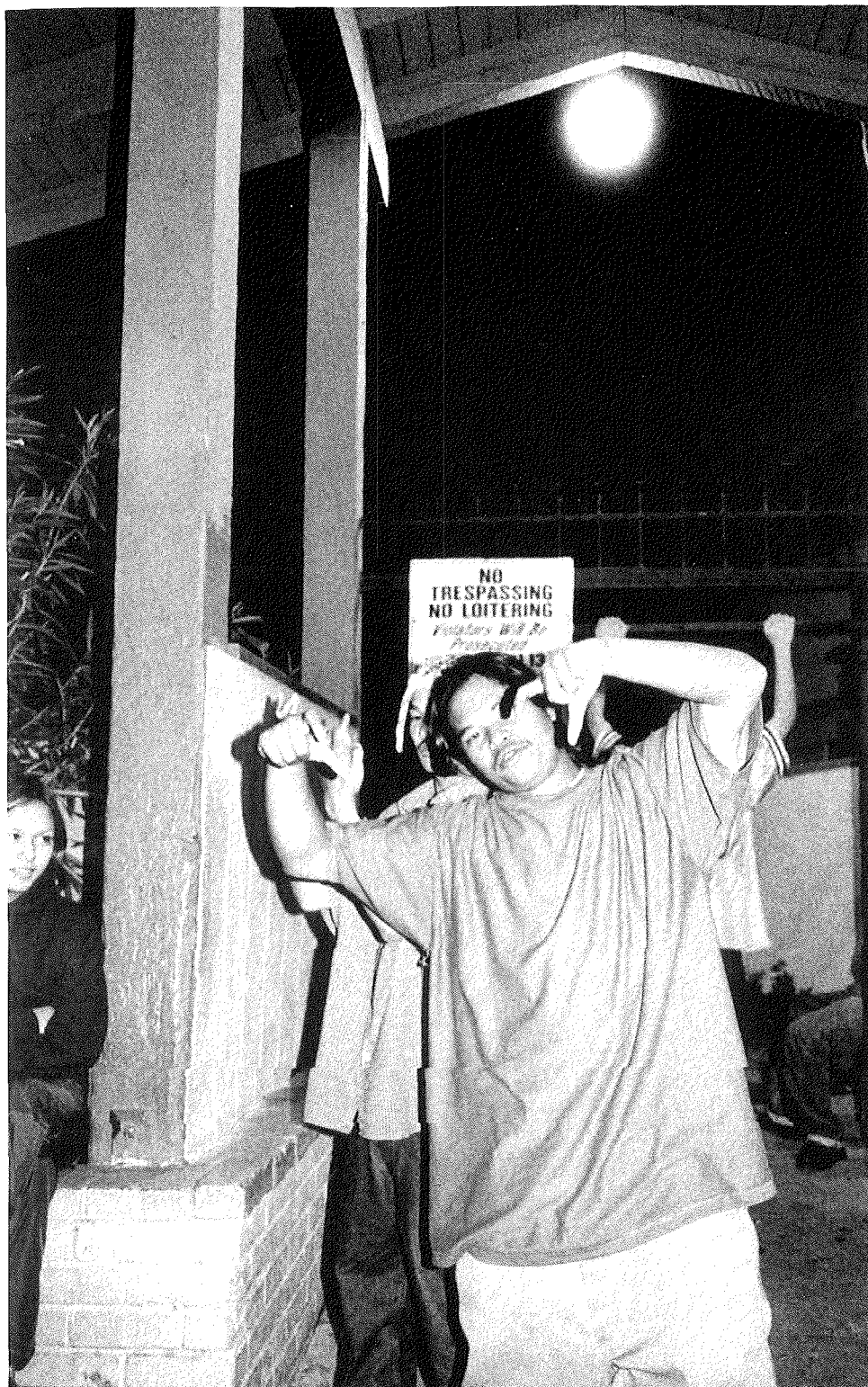


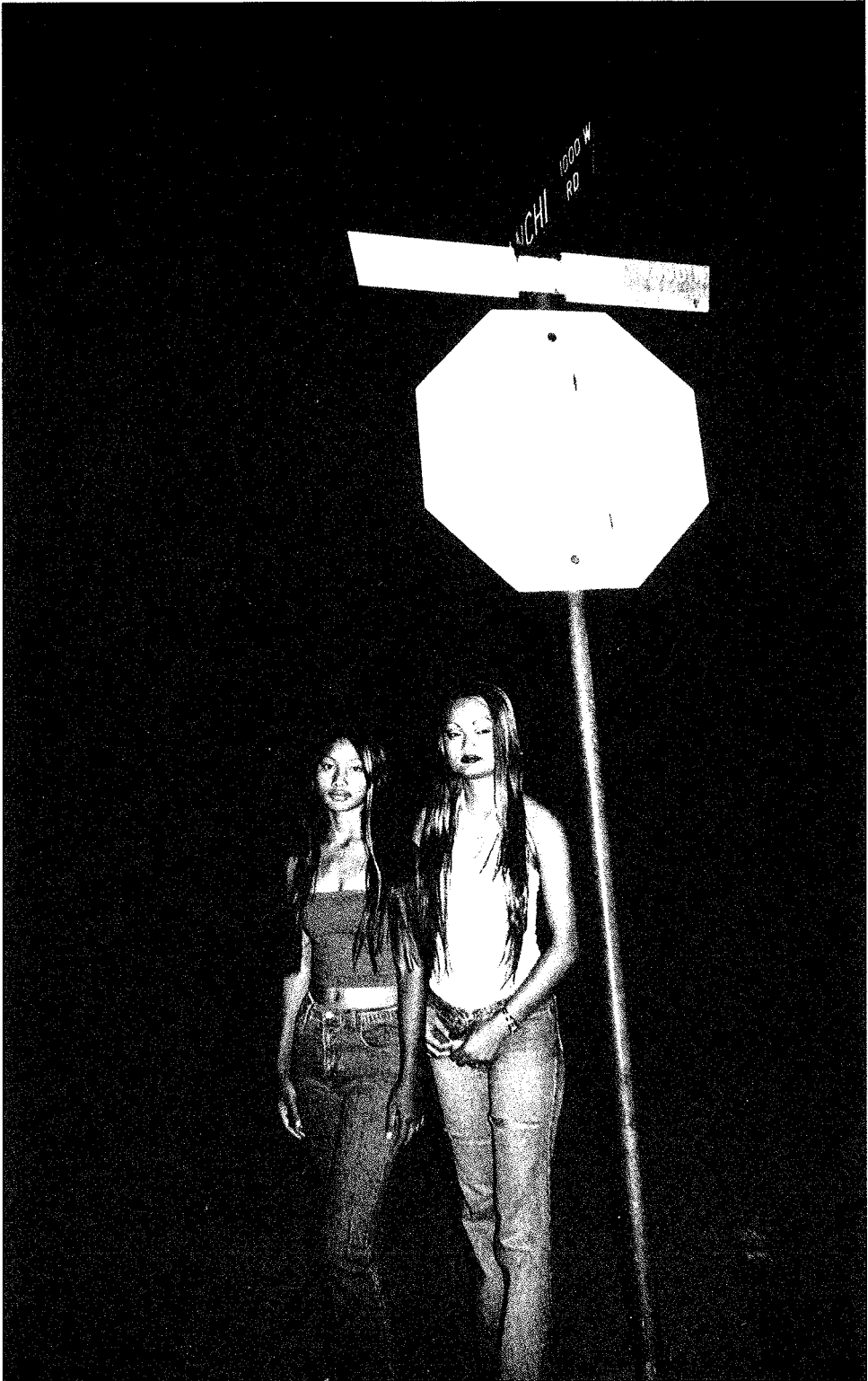


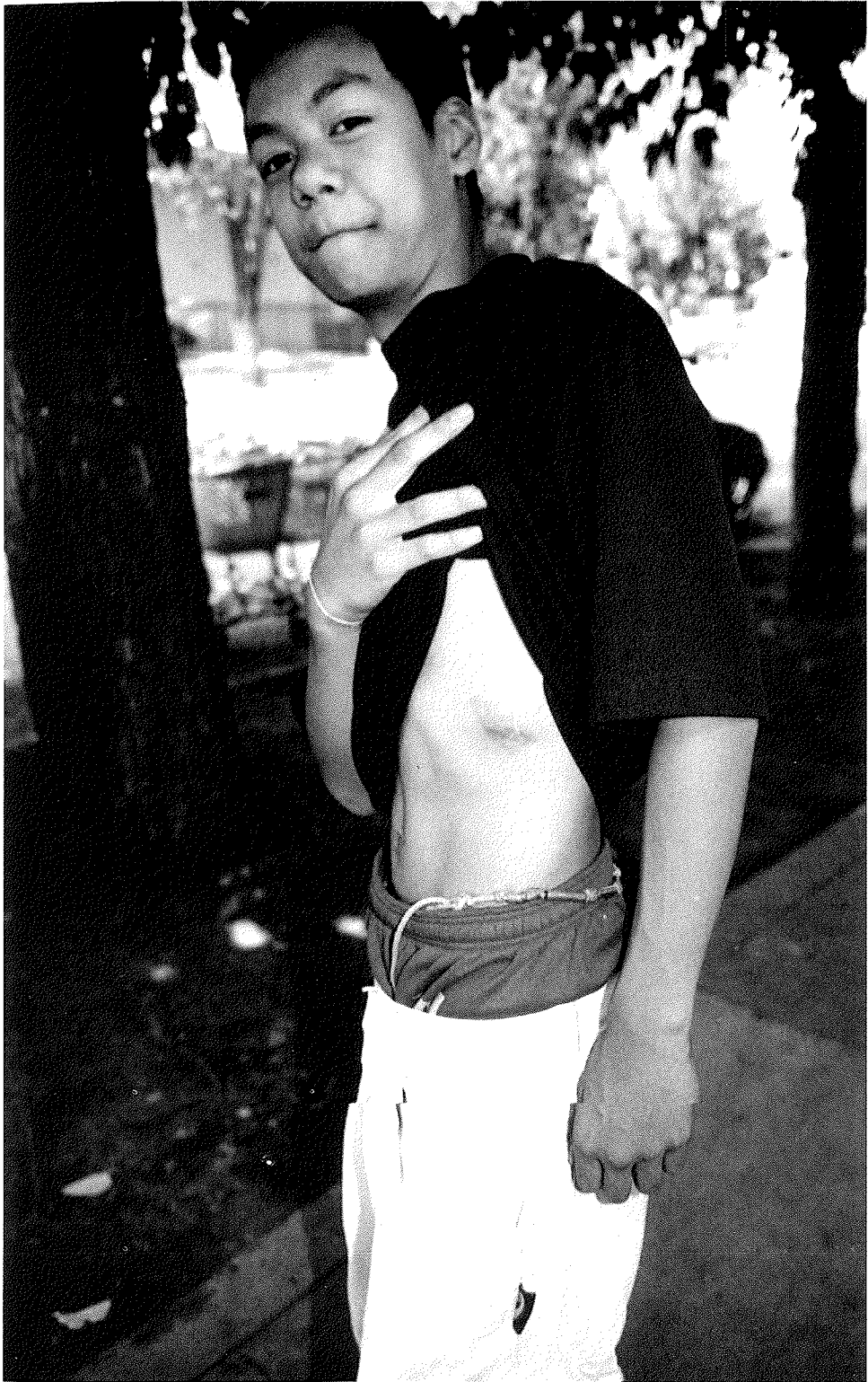


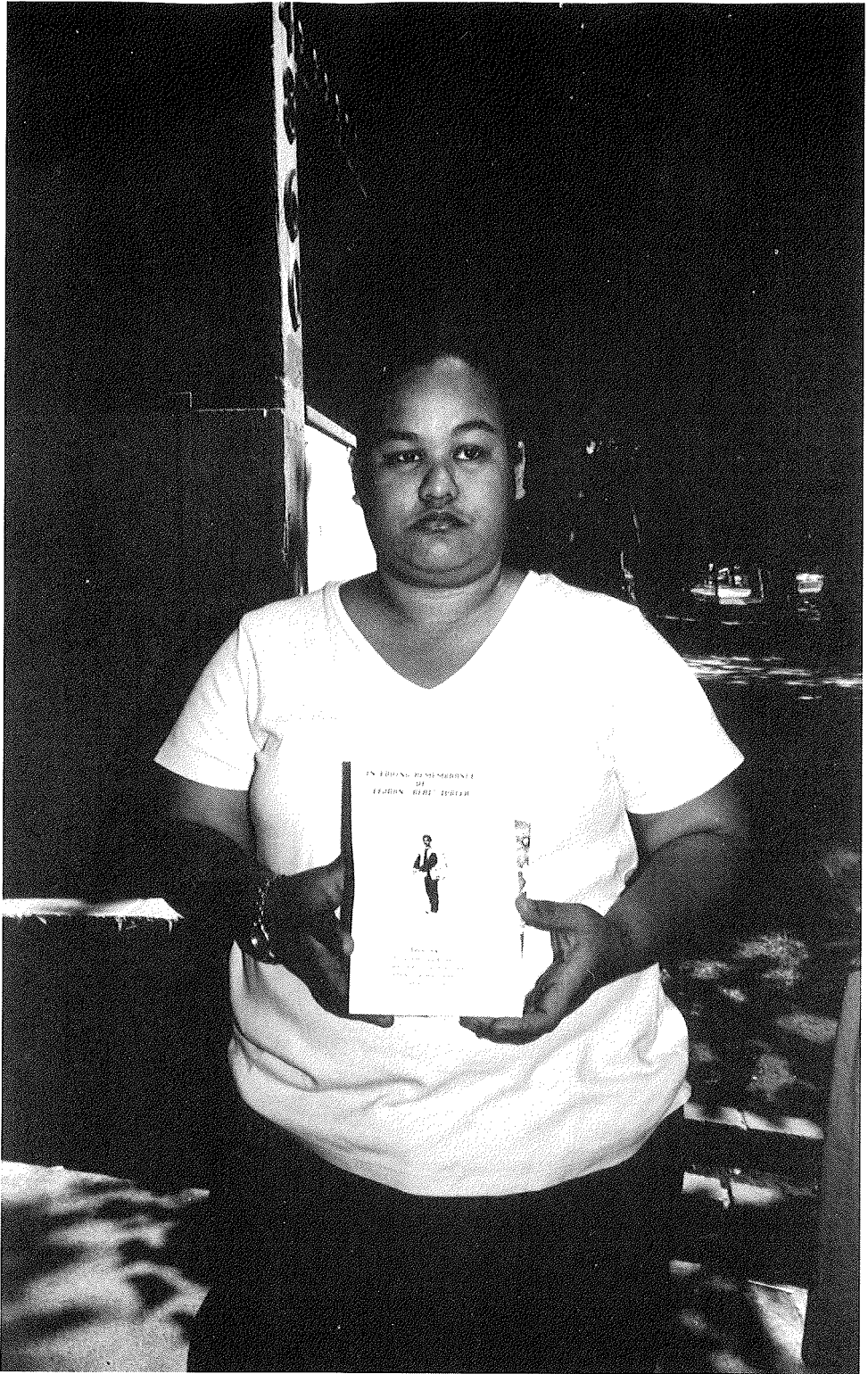




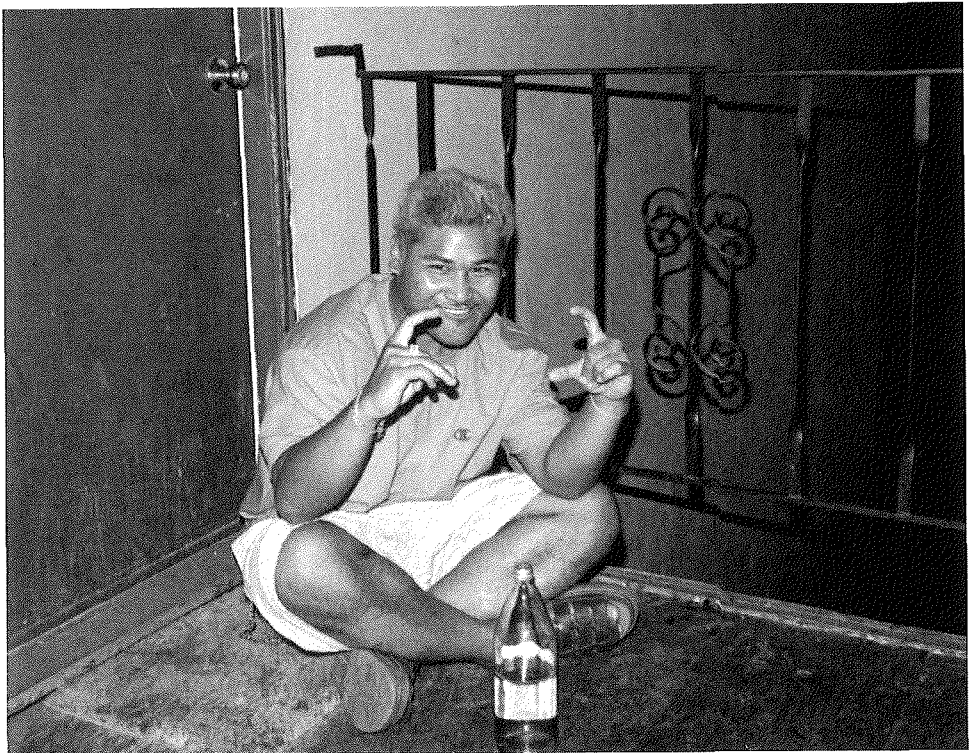
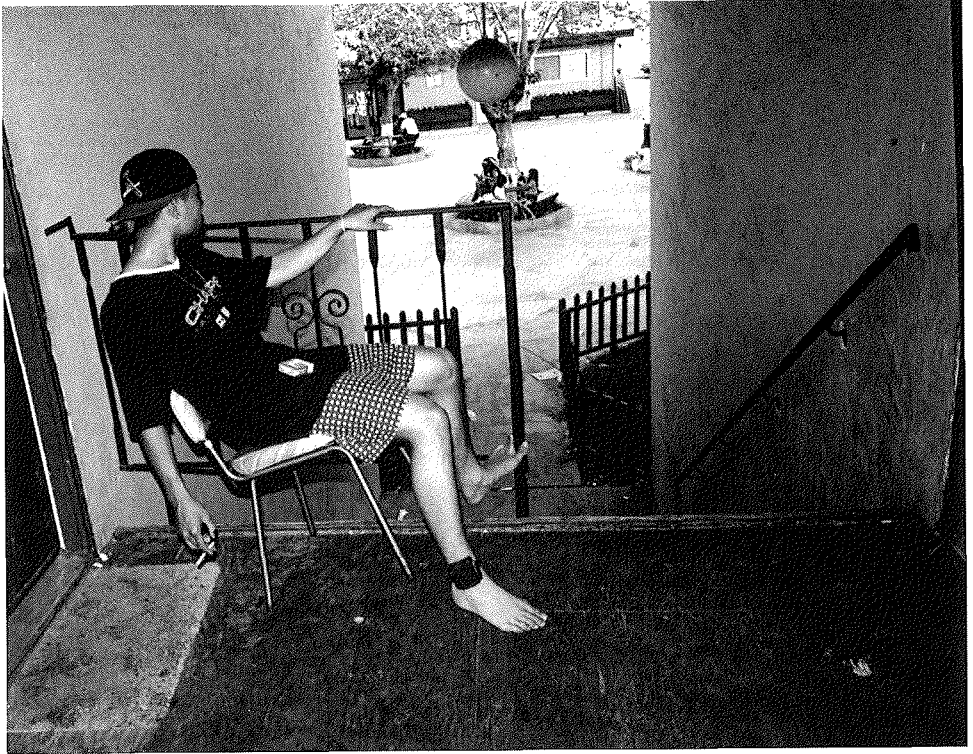












THE SKULLS ON THE SHELVES (1991, 1996)

THE STATE OF CAMBODIA
("INDEPENDENCE, PEACE, LIBERTY, HAPPINESS")
(1991)

T-3 PRISON, PHNOM PENH

The blue-walled, chessboard-floored visiting room had splendid benches and chairs, all made by the prisoners. They were taught woodworking. It would have been nice to see the woodworking shop, but unfortunately that was off-limits. Many things were off-limits in T-3. In the sunny space where mortar crumbled wearily between bricks, children stretched on their tiptoes to peer in through the bars where the photographer and I sat waiting, a single fan unmoving, the interpreter and the driver smoking up a storm, and a pin-striped man from the Ministry of International Affairs was sitting in, too. He worked for Interpol, the interpreter said.

Would you like to work for Interpol? I asked.

No, no, said the interpreter. I am a soft-hearted man. I don't want to watch their faces when they're being questioned....

The Deputy Chief came in, smiling in green.

How many people are at this prison?

I have no authority to release statistics, said the Deputy Chief.

Do the Khmer Rouge make up a large or a small proportion?

Sir, I cannot tell you about that.

Are there any executions?

No. We have to educate them about the party line. We avoid to hit them. So we educate the thinking of people. We give them the new situation about Cambodia and we explain them about their mistake before. Here they are happy because we don't hit them.

The boy in the dark prison pajamas sat miserably in the chair. He had been with the other side for four years when he was captured.

Why did you join the Khmer Rouge?

Because...because I was confused from enemy...

How old are you?

Twenty years.

So you remember the Pol Pot time?

I were a child in the Pol Pot time. My parents are farmer. Now, you see, I am alone, because my parents and some relatives were killed.

And after that you still joined the Khmer Rouge?

You see, the Khmer Rouge send some woman to our area, and she make some propaganda for them and I was confused. I was a young boy, and she told me about the policy of the guerrilla war, about the struggle against the enemy, and I could not understand. She didn't know about my family, because she had relations with the enemy, and she worked all around to spread propaganda.

Was she beautiful?

She were a wife with three children.

What did you believe as a Khmer Rouge?

I were not clearly educated about his policy, the boy whispered. For me it was not clear.

I had known when I first came into T-3 that I would not hear the full truth, that some questions were not even worth asking when the Deputy Chief was there, that human beings in tight spots will justify themselves, like Field Marshal Keitel who, after being compelled to view a film of atrocities committed by the government of which he'd been a member, cried: "When I see such things, I'm ashamed of being a German! —It was those dirty SS swine! —If I had known it I would have told my son, 'I'd rather shoot you than have you join the SS.' But I didn't know. —I'll never be able to look people in the face again."¹ —And yet sometimes truth is there in the evasions; I had to at least seek it. So I said: Did you admire Pol Pot?

The boy looked down, squeezing his hands tight in his lap. —Now he say that Pol Pot is a killer, a people-killer, the interpreter said.

Tell him not to be afraid. I don't want to blame anyone. I just want to understand what he thought.

I went with them because—because I was seeking some relatives. I was only confused. I was there, and I faced with the big struggle. I went into the jungle. I was a guard for the commander of the regiment. We had no position. We lived only in the jungle. We get food supply only from the border. We have not enough munitions; we have not enough food supply, so we are in bad conditions. To get more food we frighten the local people.

How were you captured?

I was sent from the camp into my natal village. I was with another man in civilian dress. Along the way I was captured by the revolutionary soldiers. I have been nearly three years here.

Have you been given a trial?

No.

How long is your sentence?

I don't know.

Do you have anything else to say?

I want only to become good people as the other, the boy said, as if by rote, because I have made mistake with Cambodia?—

TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM, PHNOM PENH

In another place, in another dingy room of checkerboard tiles, there was a bed with a chain fixed to it, a long screw in brackets. The room smelled like screams. On the wall was a photo of a body lying on the floor of this same room, legs beneath the outswung bar, and puddles of blood.

In the next room, again the frame of a bed, with the screw-clamp, bloodstains black on the floor, on the wall a photo of a blackened body on the same bed, a chair upended beside it, echoing light of whiteness.

The name of this place was Tuol Sleng. It was once a high school, until the Khmer Rouge came with a thousand soldiers and wove barbed wire around it and made their security regulations:

1. You must answer according to my questions—don't turn them away.
2. Don't try to hide the facts by making pretexts this and that. You are strictly prohibited to contest me.
3. Don't be a fool for you are a chap who dare to thwart the revolution.
6. While getting lashes of electrification you must not cry at all.
8. Don't make pretexts about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your jaw of traitor.
9. If you don't follow the above rules, you shall get many many lashes of electric wire.

Another bed frame, sagging, a rusty chain, shreds of cloth, the cartridge box that was the toilet (if you spilled it, you were required to clean the floor with your tongue), the clamp, the electric wire. Palm trees through the window.

Another. A photo of a black body on that bed frame. The floor underneath was still black with blood, and the dust in that room smelled like blood.

Another. Another. On the wall, a photo of a bloated black body on the mattress, a sarong beside it, the rotten face screaming. A trowel-like clubbing tool lying on the bed. There was a fly crawling on it where something was clotted black.

Outside, a painting of happy Khmer Rouge, like Boy Scouts, forcing the head of a hated body into an immense urn, while two others pulled a blindfolded prisoner up a gallows-frame by his back-twisted wrists. Beside the painting was the real urn and the real gallows-frame. The urn was full of brown-green rainwater...

The next room was filled with photos of people—many of them mothers and children—facing the camera, numbers pinned to them, wide-eyed, staring, some with ropes already around their necks. —The boy stared straight ahead, arms behind his back, behind him another prisoner bent over. —The man glared wildly. —The man stared out from a mass of people with upflung arms. —The boy stared straight ahead and blood bridled his mouth. —In the photos there were rows of skulls in the ditch like coconuts, skulls in platoons, dead bodies lying on these chessboard floors, with their numbers pinned to their dead chests.

Pol Pot's bust, smooth-cheeked and handsome, caught light-gleams on nose and forehead like a stone Buddha. Pol Pot refused to answer, looked through everyone so distantly, stared level across the floor.

That was Building B. Building C sported barbed wire woven across the porch and windows, a single wooden gate set in the second door from the left, the rest blocked off by barbed wire. Little roofless concrete cells took the floor, each four by eight feet—rows and rows of cells, each with its dusty chain. Cells all the way to the horizon. On the blackboard, in Khmer and French, a new list of prohibitions. The first:

1. It is absolutely forbidden to speak.

A little further on was the chair with the collar and screw-threads to slowly crush a prisoner's vertebrae. In that famous K.R. phrase, the traitors had to be "smashed." "When we use political pressure," explains the interrogator's manual, "prisoners confess only very little. Thus, they cannot escape from torture."³ Then came the torture-saws, barbed-wire whips, canes, spades. Out of the seventeen to twenty thousand prisoners who passed through Tuol Sleng, eight are known to have survived.⁴ Some had left paintings: The men in green round caps were whipping a screaming woman, her baby taken from her arms by a man with a downturned mouth. A man was having his fingernails pulled out by Khmer Rouge who squatted to pour acid on his hands, blood on the floor, another Khmer Rouge ready to

whip him every time he screamed. Two Khmer Rouge, businesslike, were searing a woman's nipples with red-hot pincers. (You have to smash traitors by stages.) Then into the pit with all of them, kneeling while a Khmer Rouge raised the club, another in the mass grave to finish them off. Smash the children's heads on palm trees. Throw them up in the air; catch them on the points of bayonets.... A display of skulls white, yellow, gray, and brown.⁵

THE VALUE OF PEOPLE

The aim of the Khmer Rouge was almost sublime. They had a slogan: *When there is rice, there is everything*. In the end, they wanted there to be nothing but rice. So survivors told me. But the most superficial perusal of K.R. documents will quickly disprove any notion that they were back-to-nature-ists. Cambodia had almost no capital, they reasoned. By working hard and building up an agricultural surplus, they'd be able to finance light and heavy industry over time. "If we don't operate heavy industry together with light industry, we'll still be carrying foreigners."⁶ By 1978 Pol Pot planned to have electricity again, at least "in important zones,"⁷ which meant the reestablishment of international trade in order to buy the power plants; Cambodia "must have definite annual plans for the volume of goods," said the Four-Year Plan sagely.⁸—But why did they abandon everything previous Cambodian governments had made? Well, that was all corrupt, and polluted, and poisonous. Better to start afresh with nothing but rice.

They were nothing if not ambitious. Their aim was to immediately double rice production through massive public works projects, which fortunately wouldn't cost the revolutionary government anything, since they'd conveniently abolished money "because we didn't wish to entangle ourselves with old affairs,"⁹ says a party document in typically smug and lofty style. The K.R. were filled with optimism, of which Pol Pot partook almost to the point of insanity. *Compared to other countries, we have very many more qualities*, he told a zone assembly. *First, they have no bay. Second, they have no grass.*¹⁰ With qualities like these, all Cambodia (or Democratic Kampuchea, as he now called it) would need was enthusiastic unskilled labor. By 1977 they hoped to produce between half and all of the people's "material necessities."¹¹ And the other half which might not be produced, where would that come from? The Four-Year Plan does not say.

According to Marxist theory, the creation of value in a society is the result of the labor that goes into its commodities. Thus gold is "worth more" than corn because people work harder to produce it. This definition renders the laborer more important than the overseer—a point as well taken as ever today, when "managers" who don't lift a finger rattle off boasts about the inventory that "we" manufacture. On the other hand, some managers do fulfill an essential function that assembly-line workers cannot. Marx would doubtless argue that this is because labor has become

so alienated that assembly-line workers have never been given the opportunity to control production at the highest level. And Marx would be right.¹² I cannot doubt his integrity there. His successors, however, descended the slippery slope to the mass graves.¹³ Their goal was to give the value back to the people who make it. Lenin deposed the managers wherever he could, and sometimes killed them.¹⁴ Stalin and Mao,¹⁵ a little more impatient, liquidated them by the score. ("Revolution is the inspired frenzy of history," a revolutionary once said.¹⁶ She was murdered in an inspired frenzy of counterrevolutionaries.) And they broadened their definitions of managers. Peasants who'd owned a little more land than their neighbors, for instance, had to be liquidated. People whose labor power could not be quantified by the new science were suspect: perhaps they weren't producers, in which case they were as bad as managers. The value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labor spent on it, said Marx; therefore, since some people work harder and better than others, we must average and normalize to arrive at what is a socially necessary amount of labor for a given item. But instead of measuring how much labor it took a given population in a given situation to make something, the shortcutting scientists decided how much labor it ought to take. Well, Pol Pot admitted, that they were not quite scientists yet. *Our object of study is real work. Real work provides experience. If we have the experience, we only need to be further equipped to measure length and breadth, to become scientific.*¹⁷ But in order to complete their Super Great Leap Forward¹⁸ they had better apply some standards anyway. And that is why in Phnom Penh I saw a woman whose back was constellated with round white scars. As a nine-year-old child, she'd been put to building dykes in the rice fields. She had to work sixteen hours a day. When she wasn't quick enough to suit them, they beat her with sticks and burned her with an iron bar. —Oh, yes, the Khmer Rouge went beyond Stalin and Mao in setting standards. *We must heighten our revolutionary vigilance regarding those who served in the old administration, such as technicians, teachers, physicians, engineers...* They killed thousands of people just for wearing glasses. They emptied the cities and set everyone to producing rice. Their slogan: *A country without cities or countryside!* Mao surely approved of that one. In the revolution he'd led, he turned Marxism upside down by privileging the peasants, who were the vast majority in China and who came to support him, over the urban proletariat, who comprised a few insignificant millions. Once he'd gained power, he invoked Marx: No distinctions of power, not anywhere! But Marx foresaw the great homogenization as emanating from those centers of coercion and control, the cities themselves. Mao began from the rural areas. Writing about his Great Leap Forward campaign, one commentator comments on "long-standing Maoist hostilities to those features generally associated with urban industrialism: occupational specialization, bureaucratic rationality, large-scale centralized organization, and formal higher education."¹⁹ These were antipathies which Pol Pot shared, and go far to help those unacquainted with Marxism understand the decision to expel everybody from the cities of

Cambodia. *Therefore we organise so that an absolutely clear collectivism is absolutely clear, without capitalist vestiges (tails); otherwise we are afraid that it will rise again. If there are still capitalist vestiges there is still privateness.*²⁰ There might also have been non-Marxist reasons for doing it. *I am not one of those who think that the reasons for the 1975 evacuation of the cities were primarily economic or humanitarian,* writes Serge Thion, and I am glad to see that he does not stress the humanitarian aspect.²¹ *I think that political considerations were predominant. But who can be surprised that these (American) bombings, straight out of the tradition of Tokyo, Dresden, and Hiroshima, had some consequences, economic and political and psychological?* Well, it is nice to blame the Americans (who certainly deserve most of the blame for the destruction of Cambodia until the Khmer Rouge arrived upon the scene); and later it was all burnished into a Marxist sheen. Chou En-Lai warned the Khmer Rouge not to “attempt to reach the final stages of communism with one great leap forward,”²² but Mao was very pleased. *You, comrades, have won an amazing victory. You have gotten rid of all classes at one blow! People's communes in the countryside with poor and lower middle peasants everywhere in Cambodia, therein lies our future!*²³

And so they put people to making rice. —They were in the jungle too long, his biographer told me. And the only people they relied on for news of what was going on in the world were people like them, loopy movements like Direct Action in France and the Baader-Meinhof in Germany. So they were sure the revolution was coming everywhere. They had no grip on reality, no understanding of the world situation. None of them had any sense. When they were trying to build a socialist Cambodia, it was all stick and no carrot. You have to think about some kind of reward.²⁴ What did they do with all the rice? Why, trade it to China for guns,²⁵ of course! That was why so many Cambodians had to eat each other.²⁶—

MR. LOTH SUONG, PHNOM PENH

The old man, half-deaf, had a round pale face. His lips were open, his eyes half-closed to listen. There was gray stubble on his head.

I am very disappointed about my brother, he said. My family had a good name. But my brother committed the crime.

Do you have any problems with the neighbors?

No. Our neighbors is my relatives now. Because Pol Pot is not my relative now. They know I am a good man, a good family.

A cat shook itself. There were flowers on the little round table.

He was a good boy. The old people liked him very much when he was a child.²⁷ He was Saloth Sar. The name of Pol Pot I didn't hear before 1978.²⁸ I saw his picture in the cooking room when I lived in the province of Kampong Chong.

So you'd lost contact with him?

After his study in France I saw him, and then in the 1960s he escaped into the forest. Then I didn't see him until he came head of state. Since 1960s until now.

You see, he said, I don't want to hear someone talk about Pol Pot.

He was a little stout. His teeth showed when he talked. His head hung, and his hands opened in his lap, beside the square gold buckle. He was ill, which explained why he'd consented to be interviewed. He needed ten dollars for medicine.

You see, he said, I don't know about him, because I'm not interested anymore.

When did your brother develop his theories?

When he was in France. The state of Cambodia helped pay the cost of his education there. Before, he was a normal student; he was not a Communist. To France I wrote to him: You have to give up your activity to study. You try only to study. And after your study you can help your family and the country. —And Pol Pot wrote back: *I want to help all the people of Cambodia.*

And then what happened?

He hide to me. He didn't tell me about his activity in Phnom Penh as a Communist. When he came back to Phnom Penh there were a lot of Communist leaders here. After he came back, he gave me only worry. He escaped to join the Viet Minh. After this activity, he returned and was a teacher in the school and the government try to catch him...

The sun-striped room had once been a flat for foreigners. Now it was part of a slum. The tiles had a tartan pattern. The cat basked between big wide jars on the terrace; the old wife stood in the background with her fan; the granddaughter hid in the checkerboard hallway behind a curtain of colored ribbons.

In the Pol Pot time I had to make a lot of work, he said, more than the other people. Because we were Phnom Penhois, so we were considered the enemy. My wife was a dishwasher for six hundred people, in the big hall. She had to clean alone. First I had to build the dams, then I had to guard the rice fields, feed the hens, cut bamboo to build the small house, clean the cookhouse, cut the wood stick for fire....

Why does your brother torture people?

I can't understand, too. When he was a child, he didn't kill a cock to eat; he didn't make a strike against the other children. He never went out to drink or smoke...

Is he an unhappy person?

No. I don't know. I don't think. You see, I don't want to hear about Pol Pot. If someone try to tell me about Pol Pot, I go away.

THE VALUE OF PEOPLE (CONTINUED)

Who are they, these strange men who come from nothing? Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao all rose terrifyingly from obscurity, and (in every case but Hitler's) even from exile. I had never met Pol Pot and most likely never would be able to do so, so I must attempt to understand him from a distance. On the basis of the acts he committed, it makes sense to admit him to the company of the vanguardists I've mentioned, of whom Lenin and Mao are the two more sympathetic characters,²⁹ but

hardly unstained. When Pol Pot cut himself off from his brother and everyone else except the likeminded, brooding and scheming for so many years in the jungle, did his thoughts run on the same wheels as did Stalin's in Siberia? Let me speculate so far as to suppose that kindred crimes result, at least to some extent from kindred characters. Naturally this mode of working will not produce "admissible evidence," but it is the best I can do. In his biography of Stalin and Hitler, Alan Bullock summarized some psychological projections in a way that may be relevant here:

"Narcissism" is a concept originally formulated by Freud in relation to early infancy, but one which is now accepted more broadly to describe a personality disorder in which the natural development of relationships to the external world has failed to take place. In such a state only the person himself, his needs, feelings, and thoughts, everything and everybody as they relate to him are experienced as fully real, while everybody and everything otherwise lacks reality and interest.

Fromm argues that some degree of narcissism can be considered an occupational illness among political leaders in proportion to their conviction of a providential mission and their claim to infallibility of judgment and a monopoly of power. When such claims are raised to the level demanded by a Hitler or a Stalin at the height of their power, any challenge will be perceived as a threat to their private image of themselves as much as to their public image, and they will react by going to any lengths to suppress it...

There is one other insight, which Stalin's American biographer, Robert Tucker, has adapted from Karen Horney's work on neurosis. He suggests that his father's brutal treatment of Stalin, particularly the beatings that he inflicted on the boy, and on the boy's mother in his presence, produced the basic anxiety, the sense of being isolated in a hostile world, that can lead a child to develop a neurotic personality.³⁰ Searching for firm ground on which to build an inner security, someone who in his childhood had experienced such anxiety might naturally search for inner security by forming an idealized image of himself and then adopting this as his true identity. "From then on his energies are invested in the increasing effort to prove the ideal self in action and gain others' affirmation of it." In Stalin's case this fits his identification with [Koba,] the Caucasian outlaw-hero whose identity he assumed [in the early years], and later with Lenin, the revolutionary hero, on whom he fashioned his own "revolutionary persona," with the name of Stalin, "man of steel," which echoed Lenin's own pseudonym.³¹

It is worth remembering that Saloth Sar's more famous appellation is also a *nom de guerre*; it is an acronym meaning "politique potentiel."³² How and why Pol Pot developed "a sense of being isolated in a hostile world," if indeed he had it before his exile made it correct, I certainly don't know; if his brother knew, he certainly wasn't saying. Nor is it necessary to know. Pol Pot's impulsion might have been a straightforwardly theoretical one. He might have developed his own ethical calculus, as we're trying to do in this book, and acted on it without fear or malice. (One

fellow traveler wrote: "At the time I believed some of the things they said. I loved the cleanness of their ideas."³³ But on the issue of narcissism one other fact may be significant. The guardian at Tuol Sleng told me that the only inmates he knew to have survived, the ones who made the terrifying paintings, were some sculptors who executed busts of Pol Pot.³⁴

And yet it was so strange, so strange! Hardly anyone knew Pol Pot; hardly anyone had seen him...

ELECTRICITY

What sort of shape did the Khmer Rouge leave Cambodia in? The temples and statues were mainly ruined, of course, for the Standing Committee of the Party had directed: *Continue the struggle to abolish, uproot, and disperse the cultural, literary, and artistic remnants of the imperialists, colonialists, and all of the other oppressor classes.*³⁵ As for their other abolitions and uprootings, they did those well, too. Ten and a half years after the Vietnamese drove the K.R. out, most of Phnom Penh did not have any reliable source of electricity. I arrived six months after that, when electrical power was approximately as frequent as blackouts. (In Battambang, electricity was rare.) We cannot blame Pol Pot for smashing an infrastructure that the country didn't have; and in the rural areas there never was any electricity. In Phnom Penh there once was. Consider this:

17 APRIL HOSPITAL, PHNOM PENH

The white-garbed surgeons huddled around something white. Flies crawled silently on the floor; scissors snipped. An IV bag and tube hung from a pole. There seemed to be nothing but a white sheet, a brown hand so relaxed with a tube between the fingers. Gloved fingers were opening red meat in the neck. (Afterward, in another room, those gloves would go through an ancient Venitron Medical Products steam sterilizer. The floor was very dirty. A man wearing a mask, but very loosely, because it was so hot, rubbed the gloves slowly in white powder with his bare hands, turning them inside out in a white basin. In the U.S., when I asked a doctor whether gloves and masks were ever reused there, the doctor laughed and said: You're asking a rhetorical question, aren't you?) The wound was passive, flaccid like a dead person's. There was a sizzle and a smell of burning. Then they lifted the sheet and tied the corners to poles. For the first time the journalist could see the human being beneath:—a woman lay sleeping. People in white and blue wandered slowly in and out, patting one another's shoulders. Some were barefoot. This was 17 April Hospital. No one knows what the Khmer Rouge used it for. The director was busy working in the fields at that time... Eleven years later they still didn't have enough water or electricity, so the patients could stay here only a day or two. They

had no medicine; the patients had to bring their own. There were so many different kinds of scissors, scissors radiating from the wound like the spokes of a wheel. On the floor, a big dirty metal bowl of dressings and wrappers. The surgeons had eyes above the masks; the eyes saw, judged, determined. Now they began to stitch. Something pale pink like a worm squirmed as the suture tightened. At the head of the table, a nurse squeezed the anesthetic bulb. The woman's hair spilled like darkness. Under the white tent her face was sweet and beautiful. A clear fluid dripped slowly down the tube. Something the color of kidneys stuck out from the scarlet gauze. Scissors dabbed a white clot of gauze red; the air conditioning smelled stale. (It was not really cool in the room; there was not enough electricity for that.) The neck-kidney bulged out, now almost the size of a liver. Blood seeped between red-clotted, white-gloved hands. The surgeons' gowns were no longer white. A stethoscope dangled. Out of the nine floodlights, two were on. The probe went in; tie and tie again. They worried the probe deeper and deeper under her neck's skin; her neck was awash with blood. The kidney had three lobes now. The big bowl was now filling with blood, the gauzes dyed perfectly crimson... They would be reused, too.

Then the power went off. They all sighed and waited...³⁶

LAND MINES

As I have said, in my experience *there is almost never any moral yellowness*. I had thought to see it in the eyes of the captured Khmer Rouge boys at T-3, and did not. The other prisoner I met that day was twenty-nine years old. He'd been with the enemy for eleven years. —I was *forced* to join the Khmer Rouge, he insisted. You see, I was forced in Pol Pot time. I was worried because at that time it was very dangerous; my parents lived behind the front, and a lot of people were killed. My brother and sister and my parents were killed. Some of my relatives were hungry one day, and they took food; for punishment they killed them with bamboo sticks. At that time the Vietnamese attacked. I was taken by the Khmer Rouge troops to the border area—

But that was a long time ago, I said. If you disliked the Khmer Rouge so much, why did you stay with them for eleven years?

I wanted to escape. In my group with the food, it wasn't enough. We weren't happy with the food supply. But then I was ordered by my commander to make activity in my areas, and then I was trained... In 1980 I became commander of a platoon, and then I had a K-54...

Did you ever kill people?

Never! he cried. (None of them ever admitted to killing anyone.) Because I was only on the battlefield.

Do you know how to set mines in the rice fields?

Yes, I was ordered to land mine in rice fields. I was ordered to blow up bridge to kill people...

17 APRIL HOSPITAL

The brown child lay very still on the rush mat. He had been leading the family ox, and a land mine was waiting for him. His arms worked feebly at his face. His mother took his arms and held them gently. —The small intestine was perforated in three places, said the doctor. There were flies everywhere. —*Beaucoup de problème avec les mouches*, agreed the doctor. A tube lay across the face, caressed the brown ear.

In the next bed, a child lay, barely breathing, his father fanning him with a mat, his mother holding his hands. Lift the sheet: his belly was like one of those temples that the Khmer Rouge worked over: paint coming off the walls, tiles ripped up in shreds, plaster snatched patchily off the walls...—The diaphragm was perforated by a land mine, the doctor said. They could not come here for almost a week. It's too late.

T-3

Sometimes we land mine on the road, sometimes on the rice field dam, and sometimes on the path, the prisoner said. One person could carry from ten to twenty mines. You see, before you land mine, you have to put the explosive charge, and take out the assurant key, and put into the sand...

Where are the mines made?

In China.

A CAVEAT

Of course they blamed everything on the Reds, on the Khmer Rouge. Since I was American, they didn't want to hurt my feelings by reminding me that from 1969 to 1973 my country dropped twenty-five Hiroshimas' worth of bombs on Cambodia, killing 150,000 civilians or more. Some of those bombs did not detonate on impact, and went on killing, as they would surely do to the end of the century and beyond.³⁷ We laid antipersonnel mines while we were at it. Our puppet, Lon Nol, did the same; he had insufficient men and matériel to stop the K.R., and mines at least kept them at bay.³⁸ When the Reds in turn took power, they mined the borders to make mistake more difficult. Nor did I want to embarrass my new friends by mentioning the mines which they themselves, the current Cambodian government forces, or Whites as they were called, had laid against the Reds since the Vietnamese withdrawal in 1989, or the many, many mines which the Vietnamese had laid in Cambodia before then. By 1993 there were, at a very rough estimate, ten million mines in the country.³⁹ One White soldier is quoted as saying: We put them around the Pol Potist positions at night, and they do the same to us.⁴⁰

Afterwards, of course, the mines remained hidden there forever, waiting for victims.

AMPUTEE REHABILITATION CENTER, PHNOM PENH

A swarm of dark people in crutches, the boys naked to the waist... They all wanted plastic legs; wooden ones absorb too much water in the rice fields. But plastic is not so common in Cambodia.

My leg was blown off in April, the man said. I was a policeman. At that time I was sent to join in a mop-up operation. I stepped on a mine. I saw light and black smoke. At the time I didn't know that part of my leg was gone. I could walk about thirty meters...

My leg was blown off in December 1990 during the harvesting season, the smiling soft-voiced girl said. At that time I went to collect rice from the rice fields...

It was very strange. In Battambang I'd had the opportunity to take a captured land mine in my hands, and it seemed so interesting and harmless, like a large pocket compass...

Leaning in the sun on their crutches, smiling, they clapped and thumped down fly-swarmed checkerboard halls.

PHNOM PENH TO BATTAMBANG: TRONG CHANG

The rice fields were like pale parks. People in cone-hats walked the dykes between squares, palm trees rising here and there. We passed the ruins of a stone gate to a pagoda; Pol Pot had forgotten the gate but not the pagoda—no trace of that. A crowded Russian jeep trailed us, a soldier's leg hanging out. Every bridge was guarded by soldiers. We rolled over a rattling bridge to find a soldier sitting, smoking Liberation cigarettes, his AK-47 beside him.

Who lives in those mountains over there?

I don't know, the interpreter said. Maybe Pol Pot troop. But it's not near.

The interpreter had been lucky. He'd lost only his sister and her two children (no one knew why they'd been executed).

The road got worse and worse. The puddles were so brown they were almost orange. We stopped at a hot place of soft squishy earth, crickets, and grass. My feet sank deep into the earth. A soldier in the uniform of the provincial army was standing by the side of the road. His comrades were encamped in a rice field leaping with little fish.

This place is very dangerous, the soldier said. Sometimes the Pol Pot troops cross here. Since I've been stationed here there's been no suspicious activity, but three weeks ago they crossed. Yesterday I heard some reports from our peasants here. They saw some Pol Potists here.

The soldier stood beside a machine gun on a tripod. —In case Pol Pot come and shell some buses, he said.

PHNOM PENH TO BATTAMBANG: POSAT PROVINCE

The road of red mud was edged brilliant green and white with rice and water. In one of these fields, a man in a sarong worked his way along a dyke, leaning carefully on his stick, Pol Pot's mountains at his back half-eaten by cloud. Hopping along the dyke, he patted down earth with the one foot that Pol Pot and the Whites had left him.

BATTAMBANG

I was riding on top of the Russian APC, rapidly jolting down the street, surveying the cyclists far below. The soldiers were alert. On the twenty-second, the Khmer Rouge had tried to rob a rice field, but the people made a report to the military, who drove the enemy off. Yesterday the Khmer Rouge had killed somebody, adding to their proud list of orphans. —My foot was braced against the antenna. The green hatch cover was open, the tank driver inside; I could see a glint on the black steering wheel. Soldiers rode on top beside me with their guns up. We rolled through the shade of the morning trees. After awhile, the APC broke down, and they had to stop, set down their M-16s, and start knocking at the tire with an oversized crescent wrench. Then the squat green thing sped on again, I playing with the oval cooling vents of the long gun—

MR. SAK MY, DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF BATTAMBANG DISTRICT

There was a concrete bunker buried under a mound of earth, with mosquitoes inside. Shelling figures were written on the wall. Beside this was the Deputy Governor's office, a poster of Heng Samrin on the wall.

When was the last time you saw Khmer Rouge activity here?

The sixth of September.

What happened?

They shelled with heavy artillery in the commune of Knoll Taeang, about six kilometers from here. There were two killed. One was the parent of four children. In August, they shelled almost every day, especially on Monday through Friday from ten to eleven a.m. and four to five p.m.

How many shells?

If they wanted to shell our army position they would launch a lot of shells, more than a thousand. But if they shelled the people, they would use ten to twenty shells.

Are there Khmer Rouge sympathizers here?

The people come to us, not to the Khmer Rouge.

Do you expect the Khmer Rouge to shell again?

I expect they will spread fright a little bit. They especially like to mine the rice fields; they've been doing this from the middle of August until now.

What are your forces?

We have three top divisions: the No. 705, the No. 405, and the No. 320.

And what is your estimate of the enemy's strength?

Something greater than twenty or thirty persons. We don't know where they come or how many. They are hungry. They are in difficulty.

KNOLL TAEANG COMMUNE

The APC bumped along the dirt road. —Here our control ends and the Khmer Rouge area begins, said the Chief of Protocol.

The soldiers were quiet and nervous.⁴¹

The commune committee hut was thatched. There was a teakwood table and there were many chairs. Beside it, another dugout gaped. Logs and sticks were piled on top; the soldiers said that those would help absorb some of the force of an enemy shell.

In August and early September the enemy returned every two weeks with heavy guns, said the commune leader. They used .75 caliber artillery and .87 caliber rockets.⁴² On the third of September they came into the rural area from this place and shot people. We were digging these fields, and they killed two persons. Today they shelled seven .75 shells at 8:30 a.m.

Did any of the shells reach their targets?

Yes.

Can you show me?

It's too dangerous.

KNOLL TAEANG COMMUNE (CONTINUED)

Why can't the Khmer Rouge respect the cease-fire?

Because the Pol Pot troop, they don't throw away his will. They want to get power.

COL. WAN SO PHATH, COMMANDER, MILITARY H.Q. OF PROVINCE BATTAMBANG

A big star, three small stars, a gold star in a gold-bordered field of red ... The commander of the Provincial Army. He had weary eyes, an oldish youngish face. I'd been instructed by my translator to give him a bottle of Johnnie Walker, which I did.

The briefing lasted more than an hour. I had not asked a single question yet. Leaning forward, he smiled deep into my face, his gray-brown eyes stabbing into me.

First I want to tell you about Khmer Rouge activity, he said. I'll divide it into stages. First, before the cease-fire agreement; second, from 24 June until now. The

Khmer Rouge have positions in Thai territory. They use these positions to transport munitions into Cambodia. After the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge attempted to seize Cambodia by military means. In 1990, the Chinese sent them arms shipments. Pol Pot's focus has been on Province Battambang, to catch his forces to take other provinces. In the dry season of this year they used tanks and heavy guns to attack Battambang. Their aim was not realized. They lost about seven hundred fighters. This includes the General Commander of a division, a Commander, and a Commander-in-Chief, all of whom we've killed. And we have destroyed three tanks; another we sent to Phnom Penh. And we have captured ten vehicles.

So, I want to resume that the foe has lost his expansionism. That is why we see their flexible position at the peace table. This was all before the cease-fire. Now for the current stage. We are working on elections; we have created the SNC⁴³ flag; we have created an anthem. Now we want to see arms supplies halted from the foreigners to all factions. Pol Pot has changed his position only at the peace table, not here. From 24 June until now, there have been a hundred instances of violence. We mark those instances as follows: shelling eighty times to our army positions and rural villages—from seven to ten thousand shells—and then twenty instances of violence with land mines. If the Khmer Rouge loses the elections, of course, the violence will continue.

(Everybody knows, of course, from the skulls on the shelves that the Khmer can be violent. Perhaps it is worth quoting Lieutenant-Colonel James "Bo" Gritz, who ran a number of Special Forces missions throughout Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War and after.⁴⁴ Gritz had those to say about the ferocity of Cambodian fighters: I love the 'Bods! They were perfect for our special operations. They had high morale, like the American blacks. They were the most bloodthirsty race on earth. The Chinese were the most efficient soldiers you could imagine, but come the first shot they were gone. The Vietnamese were all draft-dodgers; they were all cowards. The Laotians were too laid-back. The Montagnards were harder than woodpecker lips. But they would not fight when you took them out of their homeland. The Shan have shown themselves to be effective... You can't say that for the Karenni or the Kachin or the others... But the 'Bods had an elite group type feeling. They would beat on a five-gallon drum and they would sing. But they didn't sing when they were fighting. When they were fighting, they had their Buddhas stuck between their teeth. —I remember Colonel Gritz's words now, as I think about Colonel Wan So Phath speaking grimly, uttering a swirl of cigarette smoke, gesturing with his arms, his steel wristwatch white like the sky.)

We cannot counterattack effectively because the Khmer Rouge withdraw their heavy weapons into Thai territory, the Colonel concluded. But since the cease-fire we have killed more than a hundred of the enemy, and have captured more than seven tons of munitions of all calibers.

A JOURNALIST'S ASSESSMENT FOUR YEARS LATER

*In half of Cambodia, Pol Pot has a military advantage he did not have prior to the October 1991 U.S. accords.*⁴⁵

STATEMENT OF ERIC FALT, U.N. SPOKESMAN

You must understand that the peace process was aimed at allowing the Khmer Rouge to gain legitimacy.⁴⁶

SOON SLAR VILLAGE

Near the commune was a village that was almost empty. Bark and leaves lay in the abandoned houses. Beneath a roof of bright sheet metal, three children were sitting on a platform in thatch shadows, a cattish dog under them.

Another one-legged woman came hopping in the wrinkled wet mud.

That woman, she live six kilometers from here, said the interpreter. She go to market to buy medication; she stepped on a mine.

More dugouts. A shell crater, maybe a foot deep, now a murky puddle with bugs inside it. Beside it, the casing of a .107 shell, green and twisted into octopus legs.

Every day we are afraid, another woman said. —She still had a hole in her sleeve where the shrapnel had gone in. She'd been in a dugout, safe, she'd thought—

PHNOM PENH

But though I saw more children than parents, the children played and laughed. And around the corner from the cinema, whose poster was a weeping child's face, two slender barefoot workmen were stringing new power wires. Two years later, it was the blackouts instead of the electricity that were intermittent.

CHOEUNG EK KILLING FIELDS (NEAR PHNOM PENH)

There were almost nine thousand skulls on glass shelves. I could see the rice fields behind them, a plain of light bright green, with palm and banana trees; the gray-green water was stubbled with rice.

They use poison, electric wire, steel bar, gun, the guardian said.

I saw a skull with a slit in it, a skull with a hole in it, a black skull, a brown skull, a gray skull, a yellow skull.

This one die steel bar. This one electric wire. This poison.

A sign said INFANT KAMPUCHEAN: UNDER 15 YEARS OLD. Another sign said SENILE FEMALE KAMPUCHEAN: OVER 60 YEARS OLD. The sweet-

ish smell of the skulls was sickening. Some of them were cobwebbed.

Past the skull stupa which rose high and white and yellow pagoda-roofed lay the mass graves. Not all had been opened. —The Pol Pot people come here to kill, you understand? said the guardian.

In the hard-packed earth around the graves, bits of white and gray and blue cloth lay. A grave grinned before me. It was a gray slimy sinkhole grown with weeds. A boy was fishing there for frogs. All around the grave-lips were white objects. I bent down and picked one up; it was a human tooth.

THOUGHTS ABOUT SAPPHIRES (1992-1996)

It had been my hope to meet the killers where they still held ground, in that narrow zone of mountainous jungle along the Thai border. Because I was never free from observation by the Cambodian government, this proved impossible. An attempt to cross illegally into Khmer Rouge territory from the Thai side also failed. How could they possibly justify themselves? The Khmer Rouge soldiers I had already met, those sad and ignorant caged birds, were about as far as I could imagine from the wily apologists for mass murder who alone could have argued the case.

Since 1991 I had managed to briefly visit Phnom Penh almost every year. Always I remembered how it had been that first time, with the cyclo driver pedaling me down a wide empty sunny road, the heads of statues wheeling by me; I passed wide walls in a dream of hot blue sky and white flower-trees, the smell of hemp and sandalwood, orange-tile-roofed houses, a round place where a stone-budded tower, hollow-cored, rose tapering. Palm trees receded infinitely down the avenue, like a model of an ancient city. On the sidewalks I saw brown and slender children playing, the boys always waist-naked; mothers and children sat in shaded doorways; a vendeuse walked slowly with leaf-wrapped rice bundles in a basket on her head. There did not seem to be many old people left. A little girl was running happily, dragging one leg behind her... That was in 1991. But Cambodia stopped being a state and became a kingdom again. In 1993 my hotel was renovated by a big investor from Singapore. In 1994 I began to see jewelry marts and tourist agencies. In 1995 they were selling sex videos, and the price of a haircut had risen from two to three dollars (everybody who could bought and sold in dollars now), and the motorcycle drivers followed me everywhere, trying to take me to Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek to see the bone show, and in the magazine *Focus Cambodia* which they had handed me at the airport I read the reassuring news:

Dear magazine Reader, It is my great pleasure to present you the copy of magazine... The vital information of Tourism in Cambodia will be provided specially,

after decades of continual hostilities, by this copy of magazine... Through this publication you will see Cambodia, which its most significant architectural achievements left from ancestors, as the heaven place, in which security and safety are assured. Considered that this magazine is the best way for Cambodia to perforate the real situation in the time being, I hope you will understand by getting rid of the worriness in case you decide to visit our country.⁴⁷

My worriness thus perforated, I decided to try to visit Pol Pot.

More than ever, I wanted to hear what Pol Pot would say about the genocide. After all, one asked Khun Sa about opium and Hadji Amin about bomb-blasts;⁴⁸ one may as well ask Pol Pot about mass murder. Would he downwardly correct the number of victims, as the neo-Nazi pastor Richard Butler had done vis-à-vis the Holocaust?⁴⁹ Would he blame everything on the Vietnamese? Would he adopt Molotov's line? —“It's a shame that many good people perished,” said the interviewer. —“The struggle was so intense,” Molotov sighed. He blamed “untested” people. “Sometimes they—perhaps maliciously—helped to destroy good people. There were undoubtedly such cases.”⁵⁰

But what I longed to learn above all was Pol Pot's vision of an ideal society. His biographer (who had never met him) wrote of him and his colleagues that they “presided over the purest and most thoroughgoing Marxist-Leninist movement in an era of revolutions.”⁵¹ I desired to know what he thought was the best way to help people, and whether he felt he had achieved anything, and under what conditions he considered violence to be justified. I imagined him as one of Rizal's characters, who cried out (and I agree): “Don't you know that a life is useless that is not consecrated to a great idea?”⁵² Was Pol Pot a theoretician, then, or a great simplifier like the Unabomber, who proposed to eliminate conflict by eliminating the objects which cause conflict? Power mowers are noisy and they pollute, say their opponents, but those who use them would not want to mow their lawns without them.⁵³ Best to destroy all power mowers, the bomber advised; that way there'd be no more arguments about them. Pol Pot (so I had the impression) ended arguments by liquidating the arguers. But I did not know him.

Several strategies for approaching the Khmer Rouge occurred to me. One was to impersonate a gemologist and say that I represented people with a lot of money who wanted to buy sapphires. In the adventure books, which I was later taught to call imperialist, stealing the treasure was permissible because the ones who owned it were hostile, hence inhuman. Long odds, suffering, remoteness, alienness—these too have always validated the argonaut's quest. It doesn't matter what the treasure is—jewels, a beloved, a military secret—nor who owns it—crocodile-worshippers in a lost valley of Africa, the Russians, the Martians. I'd once longed to go on these jaunts myself. In those days the unknown realm had been Cambodia, which I'd breach illegally by means of jungle, river and *canales occulti*; the hated others (whom I, of course, the perfect researcher, was too noble to hate) would be the Khmer

Rouge; and the treasure would be the sapphire mine which they operated in Pailin, in order to finance their continuing evil designs. I was home; the Khmer Rouge were still far enough away to be a pleasure-park sort of menace; I was like a young child fawning before waves, laughing and shrieking at their power. Of course I failed to cross the border at Aranyaprathet; and over the years my desire for jaunts had begun to cool as I saw more bullets and land mines. There was never any treasure at the end of it all except for the knowledge contained within this book—fascinating and valuable it was, to be sure; I'd begun to understand some important facts about life and politics and human beings; but the character of those facts made me gloomy. I was tired of getting shot at, of being stupid, of having nightmares about Hitler and his analogues. If I stopped jaunting I would get bored and if I kept it up I would get killed, so I believed; and this book was getting longer and longer; by the time I set out in earnest to find Pol Pot I still wanted to meet and know and *refuse to hate the others*, but I did not really want to be a journalist anymore.

It's a ruby mine, actually, somebody told me. She was right and wrong. Rubies and sapphires are chemically the same, and both could be found in Pailin, which the Royal Cambodian army had finally recaptured in March 1994 and lost back to the Khmer Rouge a month later. I started asking around about Cambodian sapphires. In Los Angeles almost nobody carried them. Insisting that the ones from Sri Lanka and Indonesia were much better, they showed me how those sparkled with a deep blue fierceness. Finally I found one Thai who normally operated out of New York, but who just happened to be in town with half a dozen Pailin sapphires. They were of middling quality, he said. Unwrapping them from their tissue paper, he revealed to me gems of a paler blue, less angular in cut than the others; I didn't know why. They ran about \$250 a carat, whereas the Sri Lankan stones were more like \$550. He told me that he bought all his sapphires from Bangkok. He had a good eye and years of experience, he said, but he'd never try to go to the source. There were too many copies. The only way to buy gemstones was to use somebody you could trust, he said. In Bangkok I considered this dictum while buying to be used as bribes four gold rings in one of those Chinatown stores with long banana-shaped counters whose necklaces, chains, king pendants, bracelets, whose solid gold washers stamped with Chinese characters, whose bricks and lumps and ingots of gold all illuminated the chins of the clerks with dazzling yellow, as if a million flashlights were shining up their necks. At D.'s recommendation, I got unworked rings rather than the elaborately chased and patterned objects which the recipients would lose money on if they tried to sell them; this I confirmed by going into the gold shop next door and pretending to try to sell one of the rings, which I'd paid fourteen hundred baht apiece for;⁵⁴ the old lady frowned and sighed and offered me nine hundred.⁵⁵—So I tell you why the PULO hate Chinese, because they always make business like this! said D. So stupid, those PULO, saying that, then buying and selling gold in Chinatown, losing money!—In the jewelry district a few blocks down, the stores were smaller and not

as crowded. I saw many sapphires set in rings, but these were always the darker Thai sapphires. I saw one set of rings with paler blue stones, but those were Burmese. Over and over they told me that Cambodian sapphires were no good, were not beautiful, were too often fake, and came from a country "without control," so that the buyers had no guarantee. The Thais could be a little xenophobic beneath their politeness, but it was hard to blame them. Sometimes Cambodian troops would come into Thailand and kill people, and sometimes Burmese troops would. In February 1995, for instance, two Thai soldiers were killed and three wounded by Cambodians in the Khun district of Si Sa Ket province. The Thais lodged a protest about that occurrence, and also about "artillery shells which landed in Thailand during recent fighting."⁵⁶ As we unknotted a way between the plump, sugarcane-chewing girls whose fruits for sale walled the sidewalk, I began to get a sinking feeling about the jewel-buying strategy, and later I met a man who told me quite simply: The bottom's dropped out of the Cambodian sapphire market.

A second notion I had was to pretend to be C.I.A. Supposedly Ray Cline, the agency's former deputy director, had visited the K.R. in Cambodia in 1980 and gotten along with them quite well.⁵⁷ With adamant cynicism, the U.S. maintained that Pol Pot ought to be supported because the Hun Sen government of Cambodia was Communist. Maybe it was. If so, that still wouldn't have made supporting Pol Pot, the self-professed Maoist, justifiable. And in 1991 when I'd asked Mr. Heng, my liaison at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the government stood in this regard, his response was as follows: The government conducts pragmatic policy according to the reality. For example, the world community say we apply Communism. But if you came here in 1984, 1985, you'd find out it was not real Communism. So most of the people can have free market. I can explain to you the situation in 1979 to 1985. At first the government grouped the people into blocs to work together, because after the Pol Pot regime there were a lot of widows and orphans. But later, the government started letting the people cultivate according to their desires.

Are you a Marxist?

In my opinion, no.

This explanation was slightly disingenuous, but I do think that by 1991 the loyalist Cambodians, who as always in such struggles were called the Whites, were considerably less Communist than the Reds, the K.R.

According to an article I read in *The Nation*, U.S. Special Forces and C.I.A. spooks were on the increase in Cambodia. One of the most experienced European diplomats in Indochina says the United States is using de-mining as a front for its covert operations and that a coup is likely.⁵⁸

All in all, however, I couldn't stomach pretending to be someone I wasn't. I had always been up-front with my interviewees before, and it seemed a shame to change that now, when I might well be at the end of this particular career. So I decided to simply to be myself.

Thailand seemed to be the place to go. Everybody said that the Thais were supporting the Khmer Rouge, both to please the Americans and to establish a buffer against Vietnam, one of Thailand's many enemies. I read that there were many K.R. bases inside Thailand, some with a thousand troops or more, some supposedly even flying "the blood-red Khmer Rouge flag." Speaking of cynicism, Thailand was rumored to have expedited the transit of Chinese weapons to the Khmer Rouge; in return, the Chinese agreed to stop supplying the Communist Party of Thailand, and let it die...⁵⁹

Why not Thailand, after all?

TRAT PROVINCE, THAILAND (1996)

Trat City was the kind of place tourists passed through on their way to the islands. The islands were supposed to be very nice, but I never got to them. I didn't stay in Trat City very long, either. D. and I had come there because it was the easiest part of the province to get to by bus from Bangkok. We figured somebody would tell us where to go from there.

If you look at a map of Trat Province, you will see that it resembles a peninsula picked up and swung southeast against Cambodia so that it has ocean on only one side, the side where the tourists and the islands are. As you travel down it, the province gets skinnier and skinnier until you come to a sign which proudly proclaims: The Narrowest Part of Thailand. Trat City is in the wide part, just east of the river which borders Chantaburi Province. As soon as our bus crossed that river we came to a checkpoint, and Thai soldiers inspected everyone's passports to make sure that we were not illegal Cambodians, and then we came into Trat City and got off the bus at the usual market from whose narrow, red-umbrella'd lanes the buyers carried away their plastic bags of booty: greens fresh from the basket, livid knots of twitching eels plucked from the bucket, fruits, pale coconuts, pigs' heads (which made D. sad; she'd become a vegetarian since last year), seafood living or but moments dead. The rest of town was not so busy. In those streets long seconds passed between cars and motorcycles, and one could hear bird-cheeps and the occasional songs of power tools. Sandaled people trudged slowly by. A tiny girl in a green sundress and a yellow cap too big for her played with a stuffed animal on the sidewalk. Two men with almost shaved heads dragged pieces of angle iron across the concrete. D. and I wandered around, trying to figure out what to do. We came to a sector of almost-empty wide streets going past vacant lots grown up with tall grass and coconut palms, saw a Chinese temple whose upturned-cornered roofs (like pages of a dog-eared book) bore a humpbacked snaky dragon.

An old man was coming up the sidewalk. —D., I said, please ask him if we can go hiking in the jungle to take photos of tropical flowers.

He shook his head slowly (everything he did was slow). —Too many land mines from Khmer Rouge. Always the Thai people get injured or killed from them, so now very few go there.

Are the K.R. near?

Yes. Many camp of them in jungle. And in the night they come with Ah-Ka⁶⁰ to kill the Thai people for money. —Remember, Bill, D. interjected, just two weeks ago they kill three Thais. Big problem, eh?

But they don't come into Trat City?

No. In the villages near the border.

Are there many Cambodians here in town?

Only in the harbor. They work there. But not Red Khmer.

I'd heard (spuriously, as it turned out) that Pol Pot had taken a young Thai wife, and it seemed likely that if she existed she would be from Trat Province because Pol Pot had fled here after his regime collapsed in 1978 and for years he'd had a house here; now he was said to be in southwestern Battambang, which was not so far away, or maybe in North Korea or Paris. Leaving D. to ask the old man about Pol Pot's wife and maybe get more information out of him, Thai to Thai, I discreetly withdrew, watching them from under the awning of an empty outdoor restaurant as the man crossed his arms behind his back uneasily. They spoke for a long time.

He said better we go to Ban Hat Lek. Can meet some Khmer Rouge there.

And does he know anything about Pol Pot?

He has house in Bangkok with his wife. He can contact Thai soldiers whenever he wants to go there. Then they open the way for him. He travels in a car with dark windows.

Anything else?

He said same like Khun Sa, people talk many bad things about him in newspaper, but the old man doesn't agree.

What's the old man's job?

Official of Thai government.

So he likes Pol Pot, eh?

Maybe true, said D. Many things we don't know. Maybe Pol Pot does the good thing and newspapers speak stupid.

I don't think so. Not this time, I said, remembering the skulls on the shelves. But newspapers do lie sometimes. And is it possible to find him?

I think possible. But the old man said we must find a way, must be careful.

I agree with that, I said. Well, D., shall we go to Hat Leg?

A LONG GREEN HILL

The driver's bare brown feet worked clutch and brake. He wanted us to be very careful because the Khmer Rouge had a magic oil which they could rub on your wrist,

after which you'd be compelled to give them all your money. He said that this had happened to his father. His father had been fully conscious, and had known that was he was doing was bad for him and his family, but he could not stop himself. He even unbuckled his wristwatch and gave it to them. He took off his gold chain and handed over his wallet and his gold ring with two rubies. D. swore that something similar had happened to her cousin in Bangkok. She hadn't know before who the bandit-magicians were, but now she was convinced that they were Cambodians. She wanted me to promise not to let any Cambodian touch me, but I wouldn't.

We were going east, toward a long blue mountain where the border was.

Many times the Cambodia come and take money from the Thai people, the driver said. Then years ago, no one could go on this road, because shooting.

And now?

Better.

We came to a small town called Cham Rab, and the driver pointed to the mountain and said: Two or three days before, Cambodia come to take money from people over there, and police come shooting. Four Cambodia die, and one police in coma.

K.R.?

Maybe not Khmer Rouge but another faction.

Now we turned south on Route 318, paralleling the mountain, which had declined in majesty to become a green jungle ridge only a few hundred meters away, and the driver said that this had been a favorite spot for the K.R. to shoot down at passing traffic, but the Thai soldier camps had worked wonders. We came to Ban Tha Sen, and the driver said that even now Thai people sometimes hit land mines when they were working their fields, and then we were out of Ban Tha Sen, speeding south on an almost empty road.

What does the driver think about the Khmer Rouge? I asked.

He think bad.

Has he ever seen them?

Never.

We were right up against the base of the ridge now, which was true jungle with bamboo and wild tousle-headed trees all crowding one another greenly, and on our right was the sea. Tourists had told me that it was very unspoiled here. I got out to take a leak and amidst the language of birds admired the fifteen- and twenty-foot grasses, the glossy fern trees, the mounds and pillars and bulges of greenery. I did not go very far. It would be very easy to hide a mine here.

Ask him where we can buy an Ah-Ka, I said.

He say Koh Kong. Is island in Kambuja.⁶¹ They sell Ah-Ka left over from war for one thousand baht.⁶² Heroin come from there now, too. In Trat you can buy one kilo for two thousand baht.

Cheap, I approved.

Now Thailand was so narrow that I could see right across it, from that land-

mine-packed green hill on the left, which slanted gently ever lower, to the palm trees and aerated square pools of shrimp farms on the right. (Later, when I had to drop big money taking to lunch people who might or might not know the K.R., D. and I would frequently go right to the beachfront restaurants just past hot dreary fields riddled with stakes; a Cambodian refugee camp had once been here.) Often we passed the red signposts of soldier camps, more than I had seen anywhere else in Thailand. We were almost at the end of Thailand now. Then, just as at Huey Phoun when I'd tried to go to Burma, we came suddenly to a soldier post where we were stopped and led before the majestic altar of sandbags where they confiscated my passport for my own good because Cambodia was too dangerous. —So danger for *falang*⁶³ because Cambodia different from Thai people, the officer explained in Thai's translation. They are so stupid. We cannot guarantee. One falang, we take his passport, but he go into Cambodia anyway, and go to those islands, maybe they kill him, but he lucky, he return. Thai soldier was angry! Journalist, I think. And, Bill, that big soldier, fat one, one night he go into Cambodia alone...

To see a prostitute? I hypothesized.

I think something like that, D. laughed. And they kidnap him, but he come back. Maybe he paid them?

I think so. You know, sometimes I so sad for my country. I don't like Thai government teach police and soldier always afraid like this—you see?

The soldiers got very friendly after I went along with their commands, and when I asked where Pol Pot was they assured me that he could be found on Jao Mountain, which was an island not too far inside Cambodia. That seemed as plausible as North Korea, anyway. So I photographed the soldiers in their splendid uniforms, and then they let us through to Hat Leg, but only for the day, and they kept my passport, and we came to the next soldier place of barbed wire, and brown faces watching from behind a chin-high wall of sandbags, and as a special favor they permitted us to go past the last barbed fence of Thailand, past even the red sign that said DANGER, and onto a blacktop road that doglegged down to a white pillar that said STOP, beyond it the sea, and straight ahead white, white sand and on a pole the new Cambodian flag, Angkor Wat in its red field between two blue borders, and then the Cambodian border outpost where a woman in a pink skirt sat on a stool with her back turned to Thailand, listening to a Cambodian pop song, and a barefoot Khmer boy lay sleeping on a trestle outside with his knees up. The sea was a very bright pale blue, with mica-like sparkles. An occasional speedboat went into Cambodia.

Two boys were coming toward us from Thailand, one with a sack on his back. They spoke some English.

Why is the border closed to falangs? I said. Can falangs come?

Can! Can! By secret way!

They wanted to bring us right away, but I didn't quite trust them. I watched them calmly saunter past the building without anybody stopping them. (Later,

when D. and I tried it, we were stopped.) A half-hour later one of them returned without his sack. We walked him back to Hat Leg and brought him to a mosquito-infested restaurant. He was very hungry. Once he finished eating, he sat there in his old British lady-style flower-hat that said SAGITTARIUS and he touched the chin-strap and waited for us to do business.

You can bring us? I said.

Yes.

To Battambang?

I never was there.

How about Pailin?

Oh, very dangerous place. Because Khmer Rouge.

Who's their leader?

Pol Pot. He is like king.

Is he a nice person?

Oh, very bad. Very cruel. Kill so many.

Once he'd said that, I figured he couldn't help us much. The closer he was to Pol Pot, presumably, the more he'd like him.

Where does Pol Pot stay?

Sometimes in Siem Reap, sometimes Battambang, sometimes other places.

The boy said that it wasn't dangerous here at all—no K.R. He could bring us anytime. I thanked him and let him go his way. Then D. and I went back to our driver because the border would be closing soon and I had to be on hand to get my passport. There was a town a few kilometers to the north, called Khlong Yai, and we decided to have the driver leave us there while we regrouped for a day or two. We remained there for almost a month.

AN APOLOGY AND AN EXPLANATION

Here is as good a place as any to admit to you that there will be no battles or thrilling border sneaks in this part of my story (although the next day D. and I returned to Hat Leg and actually went twenty or thirty meters into Cambodia, and the day after that we went illegally by boat to the Cambodian town of Ba Klung, as will be told; this was the extent of our bushwhacking for two whole months). I have no objection to taking risks if doing so will accomplish something important and if I can keep the odds largely in my favor. But the land mines (up to six thousand per square kilometer), the lawlessness on the Cambodian side, and the increasing police surveillance on the Thai side made me conclude that the best way to make contact with Pol Pot was to stay in Thailand unless somebody with power could guarantee our safety, to bring the Khmer Rouge to us where possible, rather than to go to them, since they seemed to hate everyone so much, to make use of D.'s talents and contacts in her own country (she could not speak Khmer), and in general to try to

work “within the system,” as they say, lying low, drinking soda water, and appearing like just another lazy, stupid tourist with his Thai girl, rather than becoming the journalist, the spy, and the target for extortion I’d instantly be on the other side of the frontier. At that time, therefore, I’d become crazy about wood-carving. I’d happily sit by the hour, whittling away at a block of Chinese *ulo* wood, following the lines of hair or lips or svelte eyebrows which I’d penciled when Thai ladies in restaurants or shops or hotels had posed for me; slowly the black lines gave way to grooves in that beautifully soft and almost grainless wood as I sat in some corrugated-roofed restaurant watching the motorcycles go by, and, trying to slow down and not worry about the money and time irrevocably draining (You cannot always hurry-hurry-hurry! [D. scolded me after I expressed discontent when one contact was six days late.] Sometimes falang thinking no good!) I paced through Khlong Yai, following the many-bridged, stinking river of boats and houses on pilings and laundry dripping slowly into that water the hue of long-steeped tea with the brilliant emerald reflections of palm-trees, until D. screamed with boredom and refused to go any further. I added faces to my collection: the bank manager in his white button-down shirt, who when he was not waving us in to use our safety-deposit box was often to be seen sipping a soft drink at a table across the street; the old man who braced himself crosswise in his dingy doorway reading the newspapers hour after hour; the latest land-mine beggar from Cambodia; the pretty fat girl in the gold shop who sat on the stoop with a huge bowl of rice, feeding it to herself and her babies in alternating spoonfuls; the motorcycle drivers in their red livery who greeted us with smiling shouts; the poolhall boys on the piers, some unfriendly, some boisterously cordial; the barber boys who sat on the window sill; the grimly silent crews of certain Cambodian vessels who turned their backs upon my approach, and stared unmoving into the dirty water of the night; the talcum-faced Vietnamese whores, neither pretty nor friendly, who sat in their low green shed across the bridge, their door wide open, the *mama-san* smiling like a skull as she lured men in.⁶⁴ I accompanied our driver to the hot roadside equivalent of a general store where a certain Dr. Maid, who was well-established in the ranks of the Khmer Rouge (he’d lost half his sight to a land mine, and was accordingly called by D., with perhaps more appropriateness than she knew, “the one with darkness eye”), was supposed to meet us on the fourteenth—no, the seventeenth—no, the twenty-first—no, the twenty-fourth. We never met him. Each time we arrived, the proprietress gave our hired car the once-over and remarked: You certainly paid a lot of money to come here. D. had given out that she was the doctor’s cousin, but perhaps the K.R. saw through us. Every night D. prayed aloud: Please, God, bring us to the old man! — D. grew peevish as the weeks passed; she thought it a dirty, uneducated, loud-talking town. I myself became peevish because I still didn’t know where Pol Pot was. In the mornings I listened to the sizzle of oil in the wok as they fried rice or made *pad thai*; maybe some police-boy might stride proudly in, weighed down by his

huge pistol; dogs rooted in flowerpots and palm trees shimmered as I cut a deeper shoulder-swoop, sometimes getting smiling audiences, because I was fairly good if not consistently great (loyal D. assured me that I was better than last year); and people liked to watch me as I carved away like a self-absorbed yokel while D. asked the delicate questions, the interviewee relaxing because I, the falang and therefore potential spy, engrossed in my woody narcissism, lived and let live, so the interviewee relaxed a little more, and it was just as he reached that stage that I'd open my notebook, writing without looking at my victim, and periodically exchanging pen for carving-knife again. That was how it was, for instance, with the eighteen-year-old Vietnamese prostitute who came to the hotel room. While I was rendering her image on wood, I asked her if she knew who Pol Pot was. She said no.

Do you know who the Khmer Rouge are?

Yes.

What do you think about them?

Evil. They kill people.

Who told you?

The television.

Are they near or far?

Far. In Cambodia.

They were quite near, in fact, and so was Cambodia, and because the Khmer Rouge probably hated Vietnamese more than any other group I asked her: Are you afraid of them?

Yes, she said.

That was the interview; it didn't pain her, and meanwhile I'd begun carving out another nude of her, the result of which made her smile with pleasure, and D., who could speak Vietnamese, asked her if it looked beautiful and she nodded.

This, then, is the strategy I followed, and indeed as I learned to my increasing frustration over the weeks, there was no other way, and even this way was expensive, tedious, and extraordinarily difficult. Whenever D. innocently wondered aloud where all those truckloads of wood came from, for instance, people shut up. Of all the places I've been, I would have to say that here was where I had the most difficulty in obtaining information. As you'll see, I did get some. But it took time. The people who knew anything were either too afraid or too rich to talk. And the Khmer Rouge—why did they lie so low? At the very end I learned the reason: three years ago, Pol Pot had decreed that any member of the organization who met with journalists would be put to death. So it did take time...

INTRODUCING THE DEATH OF MR. YU KON

And now, having perhaps succeeded in disheartening all my readers in the last section, let me describe the town of Khlong Yai, where the following night I sat read-

ing about the latest Khmer Rouge attack on Poipet market (three Cambodians killed, fourteen wounded);⁶⁵ and D. fanned herself wearily because it was very hot; she didn't like Trat Province; and I looked up and slowly drank my warm beer, gazing into the canal between two piers, the canal like a mirror of mud in whose weary shimmers could be descried without much effort of interpretation the reflections of the pilings of houses, poolhalls, Chinese-charactered grocery-caves, and down the concrete lip of it, on which we sat, motorcycles sped, dirty-footed children whirligigged or gave each other rides in a rusty dolly-cart, and old ladies with swollen ankles moved with the obstinate determination of turtles. In the canal itself (or channel, I guess I should say), weary old fishing-boats rested like housetops almost buried in muck. At sunset, amazingly enough, they came to life and crawled out into the ocean, which was hot and smooth and the color of flesh, with the sun's face not far above it, while mosquitoes silently bit. After dark, the lights came on inside those bars and restaurants around us as we sat thinking and inhaling that pier smell of sewage and diesel oil and muck, while the motorcycles backfired by. Women squatted on platforms in front of their shacks upon cross-piers; they were washing dishes, dumping the soapy suds into the filth below, while televisions' crawling glow exposed the mosquitoes just as dust-motes are caught by a movie projector's beam. D. was afraid of all the dogs. I took her hand and led her down that coast of moldy timber no longer visible against the purple sky; in one window, someone's bra and dishtowels hung abnormally white like ghosts. The lady leaned out and smiled at us. Behind her head I saw an ad for "White Shark" brand liquid amphetamine. I requested D. to ask her for news. She said that two days ago one man from town had gone into the mountains somewhere to cut wood, she didn't know where, and had been killed by a land mine which she thought had been put there by Red Khmers, probably. The next morning D. and I went to the market and got a new driver, a pale yellow delicate boy with extensive chest tattoos like astronomical maps, and after the three of us had crowded into the cab of his truck and were on the road to Hat Leg so that no one could listen, I asked if he knew any more details about the land mine accident. He said that it was actually four Thais who'd died, but only one of them was from Khlong Yai; the other three were from Hat Leg, which was the driver's home town. They had been illegally cutting timber in Cambodia, which was a practice so extensive and until recently so lucrative that most people in Khlong Yai and in Hat Leg wore heavy gold chains. D., whose sourness continued, said that she had never seen so many uneducated, unwashed rich people. She had lost her father and her family house two years before, and every time I'd come back to her after that I found her more depressed. I was seriously worried about her. Always before she had attacked our work day by day with more enthusiasm; she wanted to believe that everybody was good; and to her mind the Opium King was as marvelous and kindly as the King of Thailand; Hadji Amin's little assassinations she did not exactly approve of but could understand because the Thai

government had killed his father and his brother. But this time there seemed to be nothing excusable, only greed and evil and land mines everywhere to curse people's lives. To learn of anybody's badness always pained D. inexpressibly. —Was this a Khmer Rouge land mine? I asked the driver. —Maybe K.R., maybe Cambodia government do and say it's K.R., he replied.

I sat up and took notice. This was the first time I'd heard someone say that not every such atrocity was the Khmer Rouge's fault. He didn't look at me. Sad-eyed, hangdog this driver, even when he began to trust us over the days and weeks.

Sometimes Cambodia government just take, just kill and take, he said. Then they tell the people K.R.

And what happened this time?

They catch the people cut wood, and let one go back to Thailand to bring forty thousand money.⁶⁶ So he get the money and come back, and then they take a long bomb and all of them die.

Where are all the bodies?

Can take only one person. The rest too many pieces. One person in Wat Khlong Yai. Not yet buried.

I decided to ask the important question. —Whom do you think is more dangerous, the K.R. or the Cambodian government?

Some people talk about the Red Khmer good. Some say Cambodian government good. But in jungle we very close to them in Hat Leg. They always speak true, the Red Khmer. If they say they do something, they do. If not, never do. —Maybe the news speak opposite again, D. interjected, gaining hope.

How close are the mines right here?

The driver pointed left at the long green jungle mountain. —Less than one kilometer, he said. If you walk just little bit you can meet them.

He stopped the truck and led me about ten meters through grass twice as high as my head until we came to a place where the soil was turned up and charred. —Before, this hole was big one, he said, but now the rain make flat.

How long ago did this happen?

One year ago.⁶⁷

HOW MR. YU KON REALLY DIED

The name of the mine victim from Khlong Yai was Mr. Yu Kon. Later that day, D. and I went down to the *wat*, or Buddhist temple, and met his brother, who gave us red strands of yarn to wear in memory of him for the next one hundred days. The cremation would be tomorrow. The dead man's brother was a gentle, patient man who did not mind telling me how his brother had met his end. Mr. Yu Kon had been a rich and important man in the unlicensed timber business (or shall we call it licensed? That has so much a nicer sound, and the Thais and Cambodians encour-

aged it and got rich from it, and the Malaysians and Singaporeans and Japanese had gotten in on the act; and I do not really blame Mr. Yu Kon for doing what everybody around him did. The Cambodian Minister of Agriculture said simply: *All felling is being done illegally.*)⁶⁸ Mr. Yu Kon's occupation was to procure laborers to fell trees, no questions asked. Four of his woodsmen entered the Khmer Rouge area in Ban Lung⁶⁹ and began to work. The K.R. immediately detained them, as was their normal procedure, and sent one man back with a demand to be paid the forty thousand. Yu Kon's brother said that the K.R. were always fair and businesslike. They only charged you once; the price was reasonable, and if you couldn't pay until you'd sold the wood, they were always willing to work something out. Such logging fees were, all in all, a very low part of overhead, which was itself quite low, which was why there were so many big shots in Khlong Yai with gold chains—and, as in any gold rush, so many people who *should* have worn gold chains, one example of this latter category being a gentle boy whose complexion nearly matched the red soil of Borai; he'd essayed gem mining, but his destiny was never good, he said. Five or six years ago, when the Whites had not yet dreamed of attacking Pailin, everybody was playing gem roulette. You had to pay the K.R. a thousand baht a day. (That was why the boy had lost thirty thousand baht.)⁷⁰ The first time they met you, they put a gun to your head and set a price. If you coughed up, they treated you right and never put a gun to your head again. They treated the boy right, but he never found more than pebbles. Anyhow, this is the way it was: You paid the K.R. your daily thousand and then walked for three hours on a path too narrow for more than one person at a time. You could see the land mines sometimes. You had to walk in other people's footprints. Stumble and you were done for. This is what one must call pure capitalism. —Later, when the boy, like Mr. Yu Kon, was trying his hand at the wood business in Ban Lung, he encountered a new branch of the K.R. who didn't know him and who also gave him the Ah-Ka-to-the-forehead treatment. They asked him if he were afraid. He replied: Why should I be afraid? I've worked with the Khmer Rouge so many times in Borai!⁷¹ —After that they were satisfied, and treated him right also. But once again he had no luck. Still, he liked the Reds much better than the Whites. Yes, he agreed with Yu Kon's brother: They set only one price. The Whites were always taking. No matter how much you gave them, they needed more. When he went to cut wood in Ban Lung, he had to pay the Reds twenty thousand that first time, when they put their guns to his head. That was fair; that was normal. He didn't have to pay right then, either. They gave him five days to get the money together. After that they never asked him for money again. He'd heard many cases of people who didn't have the money before the timber was actually cut, delivered, and sold. The K.R. always said no problem. If they didn't pay after they got the money, the K.R. sent them a warning. Then, if they still didn't pay, the K.R. would come to tell the person: You'd better be careful, because we're going to catch you and kill you! —And that is exactly what they did. They always

told you first. If they didn't tell you, you didn't have worry about being in their bad graces, because they always spoke true. (Very good, eh? cried D. admiringly.)⁷²

The fact that the Khmer Rouge were not in any sense the rightful owners of these trees and gems did not bother anybody I met, neither the losers like the unlucky boy or the winners like Mr. Yu Kon (we must call him a winner, for he died rich). After all, possession is indeed nine-tenths of the law, and the K.R. in fact controlled the Cambodian border all way from Hat Leg up to See Sa Ket and maybe Laos, too (I have not yet been there). Those sapphires and that timber originated in "their" area. I imagine that the operational word was simply "overhead," which carries no moral overtones, that Mr. Yu Kon, in short, was expected by his backers to pay the Reds in such situations—and to pay the Whites, also, if he had to. The owner of one lumberyard in Khlong Yai told me that all the good wood near the border was long gone; one had to travel three days by boat now to get comparable timber, and that was awfully dangerous, so one paid and paid. Hence Mr. Yu Kon, weighed down by company cash, took the boat to Ban Lung in the company of laborers whom the K.R. had sent out on bail, so to speak, and ascending those clear-cut jungle mountains he met his Ah-Ka-adorned business associates, who surely forbore to give him the barrel-to-the-forehead treatment, and he paid them the forty thousand in crisp thousand-baht notes and all was peachy; he now had permission to cut down all the trees in Ban Lung he wanted! He and his four employees were walking away from that successful parley when one of them, more anxious than careful—we'll never know which man it was and it hardly matters—stepped on a land mine, almost certainly (said his brother) an old one planted by the Khmer Rouge. A click, a terrifying detonation, accompanied by smoke, and the four became hamburger. I assume that Mr. Yu Kon, in keeping with his higher status, was traveling at a slight distance from the others, for all that happened to that child of fortune was the standard lesser evil: his leg was blown off. Hearing the blast, the Reds came running, tied off the gushing stump with a tourniquet, made him as comfortable as they could, put up markers around him, and vanished. Being guerrillas, after all; they could not take any better care of him than that, nor could they bring him to the Whites because that would expose their position. So Mr. Yu Kon was left to await his rescuers. It took people six days to find him. His brother estimated that he had died after two to three days, from pain and thirst. That was what tormented him the most, the brother said. He could not stop thinking about Yu Kon's long and lonely agony. He was not angry with the K.R. Land mines were an occupational hazard. He was angry with the Whites, who charged him thirty-three thousand⁷³ to recover the bodies. After he found his brother (the driver had spoken truly; the others were scarcely more than mush), the Whites stopped him and made him pay again. He had brought his family with him on the boat from the Khlong Yai, including his elderly mother, and until he paid the second time the Whites had menaced them with machine guns and had not even allowed his mother to have a

drink of water.⁷⁴ Mr. Yu Kon's brother liked the Khmer Rouge just fine. You could do business with them. The Whites were much worse.

I was sorry for Mr. Yu Kon. D. and I both wore our red threads for him for the stipulated hundred days. D. said that he surely knew of our attention, and was comforted.

A VISIT TO BA KLUNG

Meanwhile our driver had brought us to Hat Leg, and this time because we were with him the soldiers waved us right through without taking my passport. I had to say that I was impressed. Unequal administration of justice is a matter which disheartens all of us children of de Tocqueville, but somehow it does not feel nearly so disheartening when the inequality redounds to one's own benefit. Let me bring to mind again that open-air pad thai restaurant patronized by the police in their smart jungle-green uniforms; the pad thai was cheap and good, and we had a nice view of the police station, into which we once or twice saw quickly striding self-confident fellows in green lead convoys of wearily unwashed men and women whom they'd kept all night in the blockhouse—illegal Cambodians. —Police catch small animal like mosquito, said D. contemptuously. But the big one like lion and tiger and crocodile they cannot catch, because big one must pay. In Trat City, if they go to work, get big money, then must pay police one thousand baht per month. —Before, D. and I had been mosquitoes. Now we were momentarily tricked and lured and dazzled, and believed ourselves to be highly important crocodiles. But it was only that the driver had been a soldier before, like so many Thai men, and these soldiers knew him, Hat Leg being his home town.

The driver's house was a bare and ugly affair constructed of what was probably illegal Cambodian plywood; it contained almost no furnishings except for a color TV which his wife, daughter, and two little sons sat watching almost all the time. The yard was nothing but dirt, gravel, and dust. About fifteen meters away, the jungle of the green hill began.

How far away from your house are the land mines? I asked.

Right there among the first trees, laughed the driver. If you want me to walk there with you, I will, but you must walk first.

As for Hat Leg itself, this metropolis consisted essentially of a straight road which went for a couple of hundred meters to Cambodia, and of a right turn which went to the ocean where all the speedboats lurked. There were no checkpoints at the ocean. I heartily recommend such an arrangement to border-enforcers everywhere: one's soldiers, sentries, and guards can be kept busy impeding legitimate traffic, and illegal traffic can go its own easy way. How else could the members of the coast-guard so easily garner gold chains?⁷⁵

Our boatman had a White Sox cap and a solid gold ring studded with diamonds. He brought us rapidly across the almost waveless water. The Cambodian

flag we'd seen yesterday rushed past. The green ridge still followed us, but ahead I saw a low island like a bent bow, gray-green with a long tail. It was a lovely day. A peninsula unrolled, dark green and unbroken except by shadows. There was no beach anymore, only a dark thin underlining of rock between the green jungle and the green water. We rounded the point, and ahead I saw very thin piers with shacks on them. The boatman's round red face smiled.

Because I had my passport, the customs officer didn't even charge me. He stamped my visa on a piece of paper, so that the Thais would have no evidence that I'd paid this unlawful visit. I had to pay two hundred baht for D.

Cambodia—this part of it, at least—reminded me of the border boardwalks of Ranong Province, with its loosely joined floorboards over the water, through which mosquitoes happily arose, unable to penetrate clothing but quite good with bare feet. Gray planks made parallel gray paths over the dirty-green water, with boats and houses in between. Thai songs played out of immense speakers. Beautiful waitresses and prostitutes in their see-all spangles were getting pedicures on upended buckets. Rusty roofs, humid aquamarine sky, greasy sea-swirl: it was all as I'd expected it to be. Every year Phnom Penh was getting richer, and this town seemed to be doing all right, too. Men in baseball caps slowly wheeled dollies of garlic and other merchandise toward the waiting boats, while kids swung each other in hammocks or peered through doorways the size of a single skinny plank. The toilets were holes going into the sea. This was Ba Klung, not Ban Lung where Mr. Yu Kon had died. The boatman, whom we'd brought with us just in case the Thai soldiers were correct in their assessment of Cambodia, said that the worst danger here at night was from drunks, not mines or bombs.

Where do they bring the wood from?

Very far, two hours from here by boat, then one day walking in the jungle.

Ba Klung, so they told me, was firmly White, not Red, and anyway since I was illegal I had no intention of asking right away about Reds. When I started asking people even the most innocuous questions, the boatman squirmed glumly and turned his head away, fiddling with the straps of his sandals. Everybody stared at me, from the barefooted young girls clinging to walls to the skinny old men whose long narrow beards resembled white radish-roots. We came to the end of one boardwalk, the planks gapped and rotten, and a man looked out and started to address me in a blackmailer's voice.

Better we go quickly, said D. If we don't pay us big money, he call to soldier and put in jail.

But we have visas.

Still we are illegal from Thailand. We have no power here. Anyone can make trouble for us.

She, who'd made so many shady border crossings at my side without a qualm, was obviously scared and shaken, and the boatman also evinced growing agitation,

so we walked back down the rickety piers to the customs house and then descended the oily ladder to the sea. I offered to pay the boatman more money if he'd bring us to another town, but he'd have none of that, so I knew that his unease was genuine. As we began to pass the weathered house-islands each with its olive-shaped vessels of water on the porch, it grew windy, and the boatman deemed it advisable to proceed back to Thailand by "the inner way" between steamy low islands. From a side-channel came a Cambodian government boat which stopped us and extorted twenty baht apiece—not a crushing sum, but I didn't much like the principle. The boatman said that in Cambodia now was no law.

MR. NICE

Our driver's cautious praise for the Khmer Rouge had been sufficient for me to take the plunge. That afternoon, D. and I invited him to an ice cream parlor in a less than busy part of Khlong Yai and asked him if he had any friends within the group who could meet us. The coolness of his tall glass of ice seemed to stimulate his vital energies, so that instead of lethargically sad he became thoughtful, excavating that ice with a straw. He allowed that he did know someone, a "small soldier" as D. would undoubtedly have put it, who was in the jungle most of the time, fighting, which was why sometimes he didn't see him for a month at a time. He agreed to look for him. The next morning he came to our hotel with a boy who wore, appropriately enough, a red baseball cap that said NICE. He was not, however, the driver's K.R. friend, who had proved unable or perhaps too commendably skittish to come; this one was a Cambodian who often worked in K.R.-controlled areas. He had a gentle nervous smile.

He born in Cambodia, in the Land of Make Salt, D. explained. Twenty-one years old. Now he come to work wood. He Thai citizen now, stay in Hat Leg.

So sometimes he goes to Cambodia to cut wood?

Yes. In Ban Lung.

(That was where Mr. Yu Kon had had his little accident.)

Is it beautiful there? Lots of nature?

Yes.

He blinked and squinted a bit. He was really rather nervous. He had a bad complexion and worker's hands.

How many kilometers is Ban Lung from Hat Leg?

About one hour by boat.

And what does he do there?

Just one company have laborer one hundred person, a big company from Bangkok. They bring food from here. So he stay there in Ban Lung maybe two weeks at a time.

What kind of wood do they cut?

San chun ("three season" wood), *ta ba* wood, and red rubber wood, *kanong* wood, *chub chon* wood...

How do they cut it?

Electric.

In one day, how many trees do they cut?

Hundred over. Sad, eh?

Did he hear what happened to Mr. Yu Kon?

Yes. Mine look like round sardine can. But not in his company. Just only rich people like Mr. Yu Kon can go to work there, because trouble and trouble and pay and pay.

And when he goes to work, is he afraid of land mines?

No. Before the company go to clear for wood, they have one member of K.R. to clear mine.

Does he ever see the mines?

Sometimes. He see long green one like perfume bottle. They throw mine a lot, so much he cannot count them. They clear with tractor.

How many friends does he have in the Khmer Rouge?

Not so friendly, but in some group. Talking with him, drinking, like that, but not friend.

And when does he go to Ban Lung again?

Now is the area make wood in Cambodia closed. U.N. help Cambodia, but say if you don't stop people cut wood, I don't help you. And company throw money, cannot get money back.

So what does he do for money?

Just stay at home. Sometimes he driver for gasoline, motor oil.

Can he take us to see the land mines?

Such a dangerous way! Maybe you die. And so many checkpoints! Even the government here can put him in jail or do bad things. Government of Cambodia, they catch him and put him in jail. But K.R. is okay. He more afraid of government than Khmer Rouge. Khmer Rouge good. If we give the food, he take. If we don't give, he don't take. But Cambodia government soldiers come; they come maybe one-two times a day to take the things.

When the K.R. come, what do they talk about?

They talk about they work for the people, for the citizen. They say they must kill, even if don't want to kill, because government do the bad thing first.

How old are they?

Soldiers of Khmer Rouge must be twenty years over.

How many of them are there in his area?

About ten. Just ten come to look and take care of us. From their camp to that areas, about one day walking, but quickly walking.

What do they look like? How does one recognize them?

From uniform. Just green color uniform like a leaf of tree.

Before, they used to have black uniforms.

He see only green. And have some special uniform, and they can speak Thai.

(A few weeks later, another informant, a plump mustachioed individual who continually sucked hard candies, reported one could easily tell Red from White by the color of their uniforms. Whites talked very quickly like Bangkok people; Reds had a regional accent similar to that of Thais from See Sa Ket. He said that it didn't do to get too friendly with the Reds, or with any Cambodians, for that matter. One man to whom he was very close had let some Cambodians stay in his house for over two years—White or Red, he didn't know, for after all a Cambodian was a Cambodian. The Cambodian went back to his country, but later returned, killed him, and took all his gold.)

I wanted to see if the Khmer Rouge were still Communist, so I asked the boy: What are they, Buddhist or Communist or what?

Mixed. Islam, Buddhist, Christian, like that, he surprisingly replied.

So they're not Communist, then?

Different. All of Khmer Rouge soldiers talk only about citizen; they can die for them; they love them so much.

(I closed my eyes and saw again the skulls on the shelves.)

And what do they say about the Vietnamese? I pursued.

They don't like Vietnamese. And they know how many in every province of Cambodia.

And Sihanouk?

They like.

And the Thais?

They like. They can speak Thai.

And Caucasians?

They never know about falang. They never say.

I sipped at my soda-water and said: And who is the head of the K.R.?

They never talk about him. They have one of leader, a daughter of Sihanouk by another wife. Pa Te Wee. Name mean like beautiful angel.

Where does she stay?

In Si Tu, look like province, near Borai. People trust in her so much.⁷⁶

What is the best way to go see the K.R.?

Wat Abuk is the area. From here thirty kilos over. We go by car about two-three kilo and then they have a big camp of Red Khmer.

Has he been there before?

Yes. He know.

Does he keep in touch with his parents?

He have adopted mother here in Thailand, but his real mother in Cambodia.

And his father?

Governor in ———. And when fighting with Vietnam, his father disappear. Does his mother ever talk about the Pol Pot time?

She talk just many people die in the war with Vietnamese fighting. She say Cambodia kill Cambodia together.

Why did they do that?

He don't know so much.

And what does his mother think about the K.R.—good or bad?

She don't know.

Does he want to be a K.R. member?

He don't want. Life here is better. In Cambodia, he run away from being government soldier. He don't want to kill.

The boy hung his head and smiled. —Actually, his real age is twenty-four. But he put in Thai citizenship application twenty-one.

Oh, so he was around in the Pol Pot time then, I said. Does he remember anything from then?

He just look, see the Cambodian people kill each other. But about politics he doesn't know. Now he remember a little bit. He think Pol Pot is no good, because he kill citizen. He saw photo of him...

And this Pa Te Wee, is she good or bad?

Many people love her. He think she has family. But the citizen don't like Pol Pot. At that time, you know, his father was governor in the border, and this boy saw.

What did he see?

Just citizen die. The Red Khmer at that time kill. Order from Pol Pot.

But he likes them now?

Yes. They're better now, change from before. Even speaking is better, is polite now.

And how is he feeling about us now, D.? And how is the driver feeling?

They both little bit afraid. They both never interview like this before. Maybe somebody come in the night time and kill them.

"IN CONTROL AGAIN"

The next day D, the driver, Mr. Nice, and I set off to see the Khmer Rouge. I thought it interesting that the driver, for all his praise of that organization, had left his gold chain at home. Mr. Nice advised us not to bring anything we'd mind losing. We went north so that the green hill was on our right, and after a few kilometers we turned toward it. Huge gray-bleached logs from Cambodia lay in the grass like the rotting totem poles I'd once seen in British Columbia. They were waiting to be delivered to Bangkok. Most of them were a good three or four feet in diameter. The driver said that they were some of the last of the good and easy wood.⁷⁷ The trees near the border had been pretty much stripped. That was why Mr. Yu Kon had had to go all the way to Ban Kung. I looked at those logs, which were now cracked

with dryness, and hoped that whoever owned them would have better luck than he.

We walked five hot, steep kilometers in the dryness, stopping once to pour stinking puddle-water over our heads. Tall bamboo bent under its own weight in graceful wickets twenty feet high, hooking itself in foliage across that path of fine white sand. Mr. Nice walked easily, and I also had no trouble. The driver, who naturally spent most of his time in his truck, was soon winded, and shot me reproachful looks. Poor D. was more out of shape than she had ever been. I held her hand the entire way, pulling her up over the slippery spots. What if she became exhausted in some dangerous stretch of jungle? But I needn't have worried, for at the fifth kilometer, in spite of my careful explanations to Mr. Nice the previous day about how important it was to avoid checkpoints, we came to a sharp turn in the wall of trees, and at that turn hung a banner which resembled a volleyball net, and the Thai flag as soggy as an old sock and an antenna on a bamboo pole, and there at shack number 509, Thai soldiers stopped us. They were not at all friendly. Their C.O. knew what we were about right off the bat. He said that the border was ten kilometers further, which, if both he and Mr. Nice were accurate, as they probably were, meant that the K.R. base must have been on Thai soil. At any rate, we did not have permission to go any farther. (On the sly, I asked Mr. Nice if he could bring us by some more secret way—there was always a secret way—but he shook his head and said that all the other routes he knew of were heavily mined.) The C.O., speaking to D., not to me (whenever he gazed at me he grimaced) said that this area had been quiet for ten years. He had never been to Cambodia, he said. I had a strong feeling that there was something here which the soldiers did not want us to see, and that feeling grew when, having walked the five kilometers back to the gray-bleached logs, we found more Thai soldiers waiting for us, even sterner of visage; the C.O. at number 509 had radioed them.⁷⁸ In all my experience of Thai border ambles, I'd never before been greeted with such attention. The driver looked grave, and Mr. Nice positively terrified. (The driver had said that ten years ago many people had done illegal business in Cambodia, but when they came back the Thai soldiers sometimes became afraid that they were spies, and killed them. So now not so many people went to Cambodia—more women than men, he said.)⁷⁹ The soldiers escorted us to a more important soldier camp where in a cool and breezy treehouse the greenjackets, bluejackets, and blackjackets swarmed about us like vultures. One big brass slowly wrote everything down with a ballpoint pen in a loose-leaf notebook. As he did so, he stared into my face. Perhaps he was noting a description of me. I took this to be a serious indication of trouble. They kept us there for hours, making threats of prison. With some difficulty they succeeded in opening my little Contax and removing the film, which actually consisted of images of that other illegal excursion to Ba Klung. Their camouflaged minions peered up into the treehouse at us whenever they passed. More generals and more generals arrived. I was, so to speak, disagreeably flattered, and especially concerned for our two helpers, who bore less

responsibility but suffered from greater vulnerability than we. One fat old general in black finally assured me that nothing would happen to them, and then I felt better. When they began to pick on D., they got a surprise, because she was rather well-connected, and afraid of nobody. She berated them about their heavy gold chains, and about all the illegal Cambodian wood that they let into Thailand, and about all the illegal "mosquitoes" they deported and the illegal "crocodiles" who paid them off; I believe that she also mentioned the drunk on the highway between Khlong Yai and Ban Bang In who'd tried to sell us five kilograms of marijuana which he said he stored at a Thai soldier camp; one or more of these charges shut the fat generals up. She also pointed out (a lucky fact for us) that the path had nowhere been posted as being off-limits, and that we had in fact turned back when we were ordered—no matter that we would have continued on if Mr. Nice had known another way. At this, the generals became cautious. They wrote down D.'s passport information, then asked for mine, but fortunately couldn't figure out which of all those Roman characters comprised my name. They told us to leave the province soon, and to stay on the beach with the other falangs. With my best idiotic smile, I asked them where in the jungle D. and I could go to make woodcuts of flowers. This, however, D. refused to translate. Finally they let us go.

The next morning some big fat loud police sat at a table near us at the little restaurant we patronized in Khlong Yai; they sat with their hands between their legs, shoveling rice into their mouths, laughing *bub-bub-bub*, and in front of the barbershop across the street two men were pretending to read the newspaper and one took sneak photographs of us. D. laughed and pointed and he ran away and the police stopped laughing. —Because this small town, and police afraid, she said. So they do the stupid thing like this. Oh, now you and me in control again!

The day after that we went to our safe-deposit box and found one roll of exposed film—all that I had taken thus far—missing. It consisted of street scenes in Bangkok, of the sort that any tourist might take, so I hoped that it might throw them off the scent. To further waste their time (or "make them busy," as D. would have expressed it), I went out and shot a roll of photos of karaoke prostitutes and put that in the safe-deposit box; it disappeared, too. —There, I thought, that should confirm them in their opinion of my harmless stupidity.⁸⁰ And indeed, after that they took no more film, nor anything else. D. said that she heard the bank manager say to one policeman that if we complained about any missing film he'd just tell us that the security of nothing in the box was guaranteed. This I found funny, as I did the fact that over the next three weeks that same policeman always left the bank, presumably to make a report, whenever we came in to use the safe-deposit box. He would never meet my eyes, so I used to come right up to him and greet him in my best Thai; he'd squirm and turn away and then rush out.

As for the driver, the next morning he had dark shadows under his eyes. He was more afraid than before, he said. He had a wife, a daughter, and two sons, he

reminded us. He said that Mr. Nice was too scared to come back anymore.

THE COST OF CONTROL

Driver say a little bit difficult, D. translated. He say you must find the small soldier, and then the big. Find and find again.

Yep, I said.

But today we must pay him a little bit more, to make him feel better, she said.

WAR CHARACTER

No, the long green mountain was not the easiest nut to crack, but I still thought that it could be done. From one of Khlong Yai's long piers of motorcycles and fried squid and young Vietnamese prostitutes I surveyed the frontier, with the sun setting at my back. D. and I had just sent our first chess piece up there, a scarred, dark little man whose eyes glittered desperately. The driver had introduced us. We met him, let's say, at a wrecking yard whose heaps of blackened bulldozer treads shaded him in greasy coolness. He came from Bangkok originally. D. supposed that he'd run away from there because he'd done some bad thing. He was, in short, a perfect specimen of Border Man. He did business with the K.R. Yes, yes, he liked the K.R., because they always spoke true. He knew for a fact that Pol Pot lived in Bangkok, and Khieu Samphan was running things. He proposed to bring us into the jungle immediately, a saunter of some five hours, so he said, but the driver silently shook his head, preferring to send him through the minefields alone. I told him to bring back somebody to meet us, and we'd pay him well. He promised he'd come back in two days, and it took him only a week, so that I'd scarcely begun to wonder if he'd met a mine after all when we met him in the wrecking yard again. Hunching forward dramatically, he whispered that the big spiders of the K.R. had gone away just then, but if he'd slip him another hundred baht⁸¹ he'd try again. I felt sorry for him, but D. and the driver agreed that he couldn't be trusted. He talked too much, they said. The green hill remained uncracked. At Khlong Yai it had a bite taken out of it, becoming nothing but a strand of green trees and houses on stilts, with fat white sausages of smoke hanging rather than rising in front of what was revealed by that dip in the mountain—namely, more mountains, one, two, three, the third rather high. I sat on the pier watching people catch fishes one by one, each fish about the size of my thumb, and I smelled the heavy harbor-stink while D. stood gazing wearily out to sea. When I asked her what she was thinking she, as usual, did not answer. Now it began to get darker, and the border mountains melded together. That green ridge of land mines, however, still stood out against the sky, rising and falling by curves, and in the long run falling more than rising, it finally snuffled down against the sea at Hat Leg, with Cambodia around

the corner.

In the bright and breezy whore place by the pier, the well-muscled owner with his heavy gold chain and fat gold bracelet and immense chest tattoo of a tiger rampant said that he'd been to Cambodia many times and that Cambodians were always the same: You couldn't trust them. In the morning they'd be your best friends; by nightfall they'd be plotting your murder. His best friend had been killed in Ba Klung "for nothing," as he put it; some White soldiers came and shot him for fun with an Ah Ka. —I think he speak true, said D.

Well, I said, I hate to think that everybody in Cambodia is bad. I've been going to Cambodia for years, and all the friends I've made have stayed my friends. I think they're like any other people, some good, some bad.

You don't understand war country, D. insisted. Sometimes falang thinking no good. Many things falang thinking very stupid because you don't understand. War country character always the same. You know, I work in refugee camp for Vietnam so many year, and always I see the mother, if she have but one banana, she eat, never give her child, hungry child only watching. In Thailand we think this is like animal; we must give one-half.⁸²

Maybe if there were a war in Thailand, your character would change, too.

Yes, I think! Like my friend in Burma. Always she keep small money in her tampon, because she afraid if soldier in truck take everything from her, she still have little bit. I so sad for her. And I help her; I give her eat and sleep with me for two-three months. Then one day she get a job. Then she never say thank you, never come back to me again.

The owner said again: There is no law in Cambodia. White and Red is equally bad.

You see? cried D. triumphantly. He speak true!

Like most of us, D. did not want to admit that citizens of her own nation might partake of this "war country" mentality.⁸³ On the day that the newspaper said that a resumption of fighting between Red and White was "imminent" in the An Mah Pass area,⁸⁴ I was sitting in an oceanview restaurant run by Madame Black-Eyes, so called by D. and me for the immense over- and underlines of night-colored makeup with which this procuress adorned her organs of sight. She ruled fourteen singers who performed against a backdrop of a huge-nippled mermaid. Black-Eyes loved the Khmer Rouge. She said that they were wonderful to do business with. Coming from her, this was no great recommendation, since Black-Eyes herself did business in the worst sense: hard and greedy, bad-tempered to the point of viciousness (her prostitutes were afraid of her), she struck me as a liar and a cheat to boot—when ever I went there without D. she charged me double. She said that she knew that Pol Pot killed Cambodians, but from the point of view of a Thai businesswoman like her, Pol Pot was a very nice person, a good business partner. I'm sure that he was, and that is why Black-Eyes chilled me. Her brother used to do gem business with them, but four or five years ago the Whites had closed the way. The K.R. had

always taken good care of her brother. At night they showed him how to sleep in the treetops so that poisonous snakes and bad vapors wouldn't get him. The K.R. had made him very rich, she said, but now all the money was spent. It was harder to make money now. Last year the very rich and successful owner of one logging business in Khlong Yai, having helped to strip one area of all its hardwoods, went to another mountain deeper in Cambodia to see if he could do the same, and was immediately shot dead, she didn't know by whom... Her brother would certainly do business with the K.R. again if he could.

And you never were afraid for your brother when he went with them to Cambodia? I asked. After all, they killed so many people before.

They did one bad thing before, but that was just politics, she explained. Now they're good. Pol Pot is so nice to do business with.

That night I dreamed again of the skulls on the shelves. I dreamed that I'd discovered a K.R. site in the Arctic—most likely because our hotel was air-conditioned and in the nighttime the room got very cold—and excavating this archeological wonder, which I did not yet realize was simply Tuol Sleng transposed a little by my subconscious, I eventually unearthed a deep rectangular pit, scattered with snow-dusted corpses and nothing else except for a sort of altarpiece, a titanic statue of Pol Pot with blinking red eyes which watchfully swiveled back and forth across the dead.

WHY THE KHMER ROUGE WERE NOT SO BAD

Khlong Yai was above all a city of tendrils reaching into secrecy, like its dirt roads twisting among palms and muddy lagoons, its gravelly ways wandering discreetly in the direction of the green mountain, its several long piers—the main ones bearing police posts, it is true, but often they extended beyond the policemen's bribery-swollen eyes and came to the open sea which every night received its share of convenient darkness once the green mountain had dimmed; and the hot heavy sunshiny days brought their own reward of lassitude for those inclined only to watch or regulate; those inclined to do business could easily go beyond the motorcycles, boats, and shrilling radios to meet their breezy destiny; and sometimes they came in, like the Cambodian fishing boat from Kompong at the end of one pier, or the Khmer on the other whose father Pol Pot had killed; he lived in a shiny clean house with the sea on either side and not so many mosquitoes. His Thai host was a rich old man who assured me that the Whites always put the blame on the K.R. whenever they killed anyone. He loved the K.R. idea, he said, and so did most Cambodians outside the cities. Pol Pot had killed his million, it is true, but he'd been under Chinese control then: Mao Tse-tung had told him to liquidate the educated, yes, wipe out a million or so, and then the Chinese would send in a million of their people to make up the difference.⁸⁵ You couldn't hold that against Pol Pot now, the old man insisted, especially since Pol Pot was out of the loop, sitting in Beijing somewhere enjoy-

ing an easy life...I wanted to ask the Cambodian boy who'd lost his father what he thought, but he was busy watching war thriller videos in the living room.

Cambodians all possessed the defect of bad character, the old man went on. They had bad tempers, but held them in. The culture was bad, he said, not polite. Regarding the bad thing, you could not change them. They were like snakes. You could keep them and feed them, and one day like snakes they would kill you.

I looked at him, I gazed at the Cambodian boy in the next room who stayed with him, and my mind boggled.

And the Khmer Rouge, I said finally, are they polite?

Yes. From training. Always training to do the good thing and respect together. In White Cambodia, no respect. And so strong. K.R. is strong for fighting. Even K.R. woman is strong, strong for woman. But not pretty. For a pretty girl you must go to Ho Chi Minh City and try a Vietnamese prostitute. Beautiful and clean.

He gazed out into the ocean darkness and pointed toward Cambodia. He said: Always the boats go, and the White Khmer kill and shoot.

What do you think is the best way to help Cambodia?

For his idea, because Sihanouk is weak, must call Kieu Samphan to come and keep in touch with him. But already they try like this and Khmer Rouge they say no, if you want us to help you, then it must be only us, because White Khmer too corrupt. If not only us, we never keep in touch with you. Khieu Samphan is more wise even than Pol Pot. The others, like Pol Pot, like Hun Sen, not so well-educated. And many like Hun Sen are Vietnamese. Vietnamese is no good. All Vietnamese must leave from Cambodia.

In your view, are the Khmer Rouge still Communist?

Yes.

What do you think about Communism? I wanted to know, gazing at his glass cabinets of silver and porcelain with the elephant tusks on top.

Communism cannot survive in Asia now, he said. Because Asia is developing.⁸⁶

So will the Khmer Rouge survive?

Yes, by appealing to anti-Vietnamese nationalism.

LOCATION CHECK

And you think the old man is really in Beijing? D. asked me later.

I don't know, honey.

I don't think so. Because weather sometimes too cold for old man like him. And maybe in China he get bored. I think he stay in my country, because easy life, good food, nice young Thai girl take good care for him.

LOCATION CHECK (CONTINUED)

So he was in Beijing. He was in Bangkok. He was on Jao Mountain near Ban Lung. He was in a camp in Battambang called Ka Paum. He was on Black Tiger Mountain in Thailand. He was in North Korea. He was in Paris. All my sources agreed.

We tried a discreet little roadside clinic where people could come down from that long jungle mountain to be tested for malaria, no questions asked. We tried a fisherman's shack made of metal siding and bamboo poles, open all the way through, in which I from the car could see the fisherman stripped to the waist, almost silhouetted against the green jungle light, raising his long fingers and quickly spreading them in what seemed to me to be anxious gestures as the driver talked with him. Below the house I could see the driver's sandaled feet, widely spread and immobile, while the fisherman's dark legs jigged and jigged.

RECALLING THE WORDS OF MADAME BLACK-EYES

The next day the driver came in, glum and sheepish. —Woman trouble, he said. His wife wouldn't let him work for us anymore on account of the danger. D. said that she thought the police were harassing him.

We had several other drivers after him, but D. liked none of them as well. Up and down that narrowest strip of Thailand with its sunburnt jungle and its palely brilliant sea we trolled. My occupation in those weeks mainly consisted of taking out for expensive meals unkempt men whose language I could not speak and whom I never saw again, or else of waiting all day for people who never came—not entirely unpleasant work, for I did get a lot of woodblocks carved, but every now and then I longed to stretch my legs. I remember visiting one woman whom we knew for a fact was Khmer Rouge—or rather, I remember waiting in the truck while D. and our driver visited her. I was surrounded by sleeping dogs and scuttering chickens. The woman stared and glared at me from the window of her stilted house, so I pretended to sleep. —Well, I said when my two helpers came back, what did you think of her? and D., who liked everyone, who sought to find excuses even for Pol Pot, said: Don't like so much. Not so friendly. Too much afraid, like maybe we police or something like that. Always speaking lie to us. Driver tell me he want to speak bad to her. And you know, she have big gold chain—*big* one! And looking new—new gold color!

Finally I told D. that we had to try another place. Khlong Yai had kept its secrets. As we drove away and I sat thinking out the best way to start all over again, we passed the restaurant of Madame Black-Eyes, and her soothing words about the skulls on the shelves half-smothered me in my soul: *But that was just politics.*

BORAI, TRAT PROVINCE, THAILAND (1996)

Sometimes the afternoons were cloudy in Borai and consequently not so hot. I paced the streets, every now and then buying for five baht a package of double-decker pineapple cookies that tasted like dirt. Down the road from the gold store which had been robbed at gunpoint by Cambodians, Red or White nobody knew (one policeman had been critically wounded in the shootout),⁸⁷ there was a little store which sold bananas, eggs, insecticide, and weary old dry goods. I liked to go there every day to say hello to the rotund proprietress, who'd always pour heaps of ruby and sapphire gravel onto a pie plate, in hopes that I would make her rich. The gems were worth almost nothing. She'd begun by quoting a thousand baht⁸⁸ for this pile, and a thousand five hundred for that; every day the figure crept down. D. told me to wait until at least one zero fell off the price. The rotund lady did, however, possess one small Baggie in which lay her pride and joy: four medium-sized rubies ranging in price from two to ten thousand; and again she probably should have taken a zero off. She moved them around on the pie plate with the slow deliberation of a chess player, hoping to make some chance light-gleam ignite the lusts of my heart. Where had she gotten them? I asked, rolling one around on my palm. —From the Khmer Rouge at the border in Chantaburi—very nice people, she said.⁸⁹ I bought a soda water for D. and went my way back to the main street, where in an almost empty restaurant one policeman sat reading the newspaper, his Ah-Ka on the table beside him, his colleagues at their table grinning at everything from behind ultradark sunglasses, their pistols grinding against the backs of their chairs; one day one of them offered me his lunch. The cat licked her paws in the tailor's shop; D., who was having elastic sewn into the cuffs of her new leaf-patterned trousers, sat on a stool with her fingers interlaced around her knees, nodding slightly to the radio. This was Borai, boomtown gone bust. A few years ago, a thousand or more buyers of pretty stones had come here each day. Now it was only on selected humid sunny mornings that the gem merchants were out, sitting at their little tables, each with his scales and weights in a wooden box not many times larger than a hummingbird; and spread out on those tables or tucked away in the metal tins that cough lozenges are sold in lay that same scarlet gravel of rubies which the fat lady had shown me, or a regular boulder-course of sapphires cut and uncut. One table offered a scattering of dull blue and blackish pebbles: sapphires-in-the-rough from Pailin, if my eye had learned anything at all.

Ask him where they come from, D.

He say Pailin.

Tell him we want to make friends with him and learn about sapphires. Maybe we can buy one from him. We want to take him for lunch.

He too busy now, Bill! I think he know we are journalists...

Suddenly they were all crowding around, plopping gems or replicas thereof onto that small table and trying to make a sale. Every price they opened with I countered

by reducing it nine-tenths, à la D., at which they feigned heart attacks and cut their requirements by five hundred baht or so; my fear was that I might bid high enough to be forced to actually buy, instead of simply buying lunch for someone who had been to Pailin.

Two tables down I saw more Pailin stones. Slowly sipping at iced lemon juice through a straw, the merchant, who hailed from Battambang, said that nobody could go direct to Pailin anymore because there was too much fighting. As a general rule, Thais hadn't gone for years, although there were some big merchants such as our friend Wall Safe who had gone. Better to take the slow boat from Hat Leg to Koh Kong to Phnom Penh, then go overland to Battambang to do discreet deals with friends of Red friends. —They go to the dark market to buy, D. explained.

How long ago did any Thais go direct to Pailin?

Six, seven years ago.

So, about the time that the Vietnamese left Cambodia.

Something like that.

And now?

Now the Khmer Rouge get more afraid, because many Thai now spy for White. Are the Khmer Rouge stronger or weaker than the Whites?

Stronger, he said. Before, I was soldier for White, and they pay me one month sixty baht. But K.R. they pay six hundred. So I know they must be stronger.

You ran away from being a soldier?

Yes.

Who do you like better, the Reds or the Whites?

White, because Red always kill, kill the people.

That day was a Chinese festival day, and as the Khmer spoke there came toward us a two-man dragon with a long orange fringe like a synthetic chicken; it marched and gaped its mouth while a boy in purple waved an immense string of exploding firecrackers around his head on a stick, the concussions from them quite loud, the smoky gunpowder smell sweeter than that of bullets.

Who can I buy gems from more cheaply, the Reds or the Whites?

Red, he said sadly, because they can take the gem out of the ground direct.

On the next table lay about thirty uncut rubies of an almost lavender color. The dealer ("a tomboy," D. called her with a laugh) introduced me to her wife, who was prettier than she, and tried to get me to take all the stones for twelve thousand baht, or about four hundred and ninety dollars. D. thought three thousand would be a fairer price. The lesbian's plump brown fingers were always busy wrapping and unwrapping gems from plastic bags. I tried to look wise, offering bids so low that I wouldn't be committed to anything, while other hopefuls shoved shards of colored glass in my faces or unrolled the occasional genuine king ruby—if only I could be sure which was which! —from a spitball-sized cradle of tissue paper. By lunchtime they'd all be gone. It was too hot and there were not enough customers.

In the afternoon I waited for Wall Safe or the rich boy to come up with the miraculous K.R. contact who would reinstalled meaning in D.'s and my lives. Maybe for a special treat I might walk through the abandoned gas station, or visit the old banana lady who waited at the roadside with more patience than hope, or gaze through the cinema's broken windows. D., sick and glum, lay in the hotel. Expensive drivers and dinners had reduced our money considerably. We could not afford a mosquito-free room anymore. We lost sleep; D. got sicker and sicker.

I came back to the main street and walked past Wall Safe's house and the table of the four policemen who every day observed my slow progress up and down that same street, and then before I knew it I was at the edge of the town center, as demarcated by some half-demolished buildings on my right and on my left a muddy-green river into which some passing motorcyclists loudly suggested that I hurl myself; and beyond the bridge the spaces between houses widened, and before me lay the green border mountain, which looked blue today. (The school at Borai faced the mountains, too. It accordingly possessed an earthen bunker, built eight years ago in the face of Red-White fighting, and used for two.) The land was so fertile that grass sprouted in the crotches of trees, and trees grew right through tin roofs, pushing them aside. D and I'd sneaked through one deserted checkpoint the Sunday before and gone into the foothills of the humid mountains where bamboos and grasses were as tall as trees and banana trees embraced the air. There was a marijuana smell. A bearded Thai who had K.R. friends bought me a chilled bottle of liquid speed, folded his arms across his chest, and said in a deep harsh voice: Before, here was camp of Khmer Rouge, even here in my country. And now not so much fighting in Cambodia so K.R. can move back. Good for business.

I wanted to do business with the K.R. but it seemed that I couldn't. Any member who did business with me would be put to death. I had to make more contacts, and more and more—

In the evening there was nothing to do except sit in another of Borai's small hot greasy restaurants, the fan turning and rolling wearily. The motorcycles were discrete interruptions instead of the ugly continuous symphony that one heard in, say, Khlong Yai. I sat trying to figure out how to meet Khmer Rouge. D. could have gone across the border with no problem, but the more I heard, the less I wanted to let her go into danger alone. I kept coming up with stupid ideas for smuggling myself into Cambodia. My latest thought was to buy a coffin and hide inside. Maybe the border guards wouldn't want to check... —I so sad for your job! D. sighed. No success! —Three out-of-uniform police came in, their pistols riding high above their hips, spreading their arms, with all the animation of friends at a drinking party. I asked D. what they were talking about.

Dead people, she said.

What about them?

They talk about check paper every dead person move from one place to another.

Oh. So much for the coffin idea.

After that, D. and I would enjoy another night of three or four hours' sleep, thanks to the enthusiastic ministrations of the mosquitoes.

We were "in control" again. In America this phrase means that the world is one's oyster; when D. said it, the meaning was sadly opposite. In Khlong Yai, as I've said, we'd opened a safety-deposit box, and the day after our meeting with the Thai soldiers, the three rolls of film I'd taken thus far were gone. These pictures were innocuous, of value only to me, and even after the police photographed us from behind that newspaper I was not terribly concerned, although D. was. My watch and money had not been touched. Gradually I added new rolls of film, since our hotel was patently unsafe for keeping things, and the film did not vanish. When we moved to Borai, D. wanted to close the box. But since we'd had to rent it for an entire year, and I wanted to keep the police guessing, I kept it open. There was a Thai military bank in Borai where they told us we could open a box, so I figured we might as well do just that, extending our network, like Dracula with his coffins scattered here and there in London for convenience. After we'd journeyed to Khlong Yai to retrieve our things, we entered that bank to find every employee grinning with embarrassment. They told us that they were afraid that we might lose the key, so they couldn't rent us any box. When I politely asked the name of someone I could mention in my complaint, they all covered their name badges with their hands. —Don't you remember police come in bank here before, look FOR us? said D. Now they are in police control. Cannot do anything. —She was right. I thanked them with a smile and a bow and went out. After that, whenever we wanted to leave anything in safe storage or to retrieve some cash, we had to go to Borai, which cost 800 baht⁹⁰ and shot half the day.

HITLER TO THE RESCUE

One night, a Cambodian in a pale white shirt was sitting across from me, eating the dish which is called "crying tiger" because the fierceness of its chilis would make even a tiger weep: thin strips of beef muscle, liver, and fat, which we dipped into a garlic-chili sauce hot enough to turn us all into human flamethrowers. (Crying tiger always gave me diarrhea.) The Cambodian was polite and friendly. He insisted on paying for dinner. He thought that Hun Sen was worse than Pol Pot. Why? Because if Pol Pot were a bad person, he'd have been finished by now. But the fighting went on and on, which proved that people respected Pol Pot, which proved that Pol Pot must be good.⁹¹ Mr. White Shirt believed that the Vietnamese had killed those screaming millions, and blamed it all on Pol Pot.

Before he didn't like Pol Pot, but now he like, said D.

What made him change his mind?

Before, Pol Pot was in Chinese control. Now, no one control him anymore. Now

he trust in Pol Pot more than before. Pol Pot always thinking to change country, develop for the best way. But before sometimes in control, must do the bad thing.

Another plate of crying tiger, and another. Mr. White Shirt, it came out, was, appropriately enough, a soldier for the Whites. —In Thailand he can answer us everything, D. interpreted. In Cambodia, if we meet him, cannot tell us anything, because too dangerous for him.

So what do you think about the Whites?

Same like Communists. No good.

But you're a White?

Yes.

And Pol Pot is Communist, isn't he?

No, he want to develop country; he change now...

Refilling my beer, Mr. White-Shirt leaned forward earnestly. —He say, if Khmer Rouge not strong, all Cambodia just fall into Vietnamese control. He so happy to have K.R. in Cambodia, because Vietnamese is very wise person, you see....

In the end he said: Pol Pot is same like Hitler.

And you like Hitler?

I don't know, he said, embarrassed and surprised.

But you like Pol Pot?

Yes. Like so much...

WALL SAFE

A month was gone, and because I still didn't know about Pol Pot's automatic death sentence for informers I still hoped to get permission to breeze into some K.R. camp or other in the jungle, just as I had always been able to do before with other guerilla groups. In Borai as in Khlong Yai, D. and I spent so many nights of sitting waiting in cricket-crowded darkness for someone, I knew not whom, trying to talk with someone else whose face was but a silhouette and whose language, rising and falling with what Westerners always rightly described as musical cadences, meant less to me than the sudden paleness of teeth smiling, or the moving darkness of a nod, or the shadow of fingers gesturing over a stone table. I waited, for instance, for the boy to come back from Aum Tit's establishment. Who was Aum Tit? —He's a big general, control all of here, very nice person, D. translated obediently. —The boy had promised to return in a day, and in the end it would take him a month, by which time D. was sure that Aum Tit had had him executed as a result of some infelicitous word in our letter; in fact he'd just been held over by the fighting, which that year promised to be quite heavy. He never did come to see us, either, just fled to Chantaburi to get drunk, which meant that Aum Tit's answer must have been emphatically negative; otherwise the boy would have met us, knowing that we

would pay him for his trouble. As usual, we had come at a bad time. Although Aum Tit's camp was only ten kilometers from Borai, it lay in another world, the Khmer Rouge world, and the dry-season offensive had started. Had it not been for that, and for Pol Pot's edict, I still do not believe that Aum Tit would have met us. The life of a journalist is frequently aggravated by not quite omnipotent allies who assure him that if he'd only come two months earlier or later, then whatever bamboo curtain he seeks to see beyond would have risen of itself. But in this case, General Tit had a legitimate excuse. His seventeen-year-old daughter and her cousin, a boy her age who stayed in another K.R. camp a few kilometers distant, had both been sent to study in Bangkok (a rather mind-boggling fact in and of itself, proving the extent to which K.R. commanders felt comfortable with the Thais); and the two had fallen in love. The parents acted decisively to break off this incestuous attachment. The boy then hanged himself. When she learned what he had done, the girl followed his example. Her father was thus very busy with the funeral. The camp was full just now with Thai soldiers come to pay their respects. We didn't know that yet, so we waited. Our friend Wall Safe had another hope for us. By virtue of his position in Borai he was well able to guarantee the security of any K.R. member who cared to visit; as D. explained it to me, since he had to pay so much money to the police, the police had to listen to him. So he kept trying to get them to come, but they wouldn't come. Wall-Safe said that three years ago it had been much easier. While his beautiful, unfriendly wife arranged perfect apples in a glass dish and then sorted violet-crimson Burmese rubies out of bulging plastic bags with flicks of her pale, pretty fingers, smiling at her friends but never at us (she refused to say a single word to us, even to return our greeting), Wall Safe showed off a .30 caliber Chinese Mauser pistol which the Khmer Rouge had given him. Usually they took more than they gave, he said with a laugh. He'd spent over a year with them once, and they called him a friend, but every time he went into the jungle to see those friends, up would come the Ah-Kas, pointing into his face, fingers on triggers, and then he'd have to give him his brand new M-16, his American Colt .45, or his Rollei camera, his Contax camera; now he took nothing but a cheap plastic point-and-shoot; sometimes he got so bored with replacing things, he said. Oh, but they were very nice, so nice when you got to know them; it was just their habit to strip you of your valuables; it was nothing personal.

Wall Safe was a beatific, chunky businessman who when I first met him was wearing a T-shirt depicting exotic Thai scenes. Later on, at the karaoke place that showed a lot of nipple, I got to see him in his black blazer with the golden cufflinks and studs. Where I had looked to find the usual jungle trudge with its associated night fevers, I faced a more excruciating ten hours of drinking beer and Mekhong while smiling at people whose language I could not understand and who as they became drunk addressed their pleasantries to me in ever louder voices. Over the weeks I knew Wall Safe, he tried very hard to help me. He didn't want me to end

up like his other falang journalist friend who, despairing of getting permission to meet the K.R., had finally rented a motorcycle and headed for the border, where the K.R. awarded him an Ah-Ka burst to the face. In the end, Wall Safe got me permission, but I didn't go because he estimated my chances of survival at twenty percent. He said that the K.R. had fragmented now, and the group which had accepted me might be ambushed by a group that didn't.

Why are they like that?

Too many guns. Everyone has a gun, so no respect for the big soldiers anymore. Stupid, eh?

He bunched the fingers of his hands together and pointed to the green mountain. The land mines were as thick as his fingers, he said.

He say, Pol Pot he must kill only the wise and keep the stupid for control. Now they little bit changed, but still cannot mix with White Khmer. Even the Thais like Wall Safe, they love him, call him father, but cannot always mix with him. Two-three days ago, four Thai soldiers killed here.

Why? That sounds bad for business.

Because in the dark time, you know. Just shooting, don't know who is spy.

So who killed those Thais—Reds or Whites?

Nobody know, never mind.

From a Cambodian newspaper:

PHNOM PENH—Two military policemen were killed by district police when...they started to stop and rob passing villagers using their pistols.⁹²

WOES OF THE RICH BOY

The rich boy, squat and crop-haired, was as I said our other great hope in Borai. He was very nice, although he'd been a member of some Mafia or other in Bangkok before and had killed a dozen people. He was sorry about that now. With his bracelet of thick gold links, his cellular phone always in a shirt pocket, his ring of many diamonds, and his loud, gruff voice, he certainly made an authoritative impression. He had a heart; he used to sell surplus Khmer Rouge weapons to the Karenni at a loss, because he hated the Burmese government so much. He adopted D. and me also as one of his charity cases. He tried and tried to help us, but the K.R. didn't want to meet me; there was nothing that he could do. Consider, for instance, the K.R. "big general" in Chantaburi who was the rich boy's friend. He owned a house there, the rich boy said, which, if literally true, was damning evidence of the Thais' willingness to bend their own rules into order to accommodate the Khmer Rouge, for in Thailand a foreigner could not hold land. I once heard the sad tale of an old falang who fell in love with a Patpong prostitute, married her, had children with her, built a nice house, went on a business trip, and returned to find wife,

house, and children gone forever—for, of course, only the wife herself, being Thai, had had legal title, and in his absence she'd simply sold the land to a developer who ripped the house down. The falang went crazy. Perhaps this Khmer Rouge general had a Thai wife, too—who knows? If he did, she wouldn't dare to pull the same trick, since it is suicide to cheat the Khmer Rouge. In any event, he sent word to us that he didn't want to meet any journalists, ever. They never said anything good about the K.R., by which I suppose he meant that they were always harping on the skulls on the shelves. At this, D. waxed magnificently indignant and told the rich boy that we'd already met Khun Sa and Hadji Amin, those two kingpins of south-east Asia; what was Pol Pot himself in comparison but a puffed-up frog in the small Cambodian pond? Obviously impressed, the rich boy promised to try again. No go. He sent out an assistant to snare the first K.R. who came across the border for supplies,³³ but the fighting was heavy just then and nobody came. Anyhow, he had problems of his own. Although he had done business with the Khmer Rouge for years, they had recently stolen ten of his trucks, which I believe he was using to haul illegal timber out of Cambodia. When he sent an envoy with high political connections to "clear the problem," the K.R. negotiated in a friendly spirit and in the end proposed a reasonable price at which the rich boy might buy his trucks back. Satisfied, the envoy set out from their jungle camp. Just before he reached the Thai border, they robbed him and stripped him of almost everything. The rich boy didn't want to go after those ten trucks himself. It was too dangerous. He shouted in exasperation to D., who translated: He said even the White Khmer bad, and the Khmer Rouge ever so many times double! But he quickly calmed down. He would have to drive to see a certain Thai general in Rayong who could straighten it out. The Whites were worse, he consoled himself aloud. He'd once tried to get into the wood business in Khlong Yai and had lost his shirt to the Whites...A month later, he still hadn't gotten his trucks back.

HOW XENOPHOBIA BEGINS

It was after hearing these stories in particular that D. began to tilt against the Khmer Rouge. In Khlong Yai, as we've seen, almost all of our informants had praised the K.R., saying that unlike the Whites they always spoke true, that with the exception of that little mistake about the skulls on the shelves they were swell people. The skulls on the shelves D. had never seen, and so could not quite believe in them. (The Khmer Rouge understood this natural human phenomenon very well. This was why when in 1991 they captured Wat Treng in Battambang, they burned the killing fields monument established by the Vietnamese.) But by now she'd become friends with Wall Safe and the rich boy. When she understood that even they, who did a steady and significant business with the K.R., were not safe from personal expropriation, she began to fear those guerrillas in their dark green uni-

forms. But since everyone kept telling us that the Whites did at least as much evil, she was reinforced in conclusion of the average border Thai: *All* Cambodians were dangerous and untrustworthy.

STATEMENT OF AN OLD SOUSE

He was a very aged man, with hair like dirty steel wool and bifocals as big as binoculars.⁹⁴ I questioned him in a secluded place near our hotel, at a creek dried down to a mire of contiguous pools the color and temperature of lukewarm coffee.

Have you been to Pailin? I asked.

Many times.

When was the last time?

Last month.

The people there are your friends?

The Thais, yes. Cambodians, difficult to get friendly with them.

Are they Communist?

Yes.

What are they like?

Not speak true. Not friendly. Not—gentle.

Many guns?

Yes, and many bombs.

A SMALL TOWN NEAR KHLONG YAI (1996)

Not far from Khlong Yai was another village whose head, blocky, brawny, but going to fat, could have been a model for a movie about aging Stalinist shock workers. He had a way of clenching his fists and saying: Mmm. —The rich boy, who'd put us in contact with him, had warned us not to make him angry or he'd become "as dangerous as an eagle." D., as she did everyone, found Mr. Eagle absolutely charming. His wife owned many gold rings, gold earrings as big as onion rings, three massive gold chains, a gold bracelet, and a weary look. She was sullen just then. Mr. Eagle wanted to take a second, younger wife. He'd promised this one that she'd still be number one, but she had refused. On one matter, however, they continued to agree: the Khmer Rouge always spoke true.

One of the many individuals who owed them favors was an old man dressed in Chinese-style fatigues, a wry, crafty old man who often went to Ban Lung. He was Khmer, and probably illegal, I would guess. One afternoon I interviewed him in Mr. Eagle's house, which was open to the streaming, stinking water between piers. The tethered fishing boats rode up and down, waiting until dusk when their masters

would go to work.

Whom must you pay more, I asked, the Reds or the Whites?

The old man always grinned. His face at first seemed so friendly and open. — Oh, for the Reds I must pay perhaps twenty thousand⁹⁵ plus food, he said. But the Whites I must pay more than I can say.

(All the onlookers chuckled at this witticism.)

How many years have you been doing the wood business?

Only two, said the old man (and D. whispered in my ear: Already he get big gold necklace!).

Is Ban Lung dangerous for you? Do you ever have any trouble there?

Yes, dangerous, he grinned, lighting up a cigarette and bobbing his head. He had a happy glowing drunkard's pumpkin-face.

How do you know the difference between Reds and Whites?

Different from uniform. Dark green for Red, and Ah-Ka collapsible. And for the White, noncollapsible. Hat is same like uniform. White is light green, yellow-green.

Who is stronger?

One side cannot get winner. He don't know how many for Red. But White they do bad things more than Red now. Reds always keep promise. That's why every house in Ban Lung have Khmer Rouge. Even you are White, your son and daughter must be Red.

Whom do you like better?

He like K.R., because everything they use is more perfect, even the whiskey. Cigarette they use is number one.

Do the Khmer Rouge ever talk about Pol Pot?

His face lit up with pleasure at being able to answer. He was a very happy and obliging old man. D. adored him more and more every minute. I had no doubt that he would cut both our throats if somebody paid him. —They always talk Khieu Sampan, he said. They say everything they do depend on Khieu Sampan.

Are the Khmer Rouge Communist?

No.

What are they?

The old man beamed and shrugged.

That was the usual answer, which had begun to make my flesh creep. They were faceless; they stood for nothing; they were not even Communists anymore; they did not admit the existence of their own leader, of whose public name his own brother had been ignorant until the last year of his regime. They were like angry ghosts.

I asked him again: Are the Khmer Rouge Communist?

Yes, he said this time, watching my face to see if he had answered correctly. He reminded me of the scared, polite boys in T-3 prison.

And how did you first meet them, old man?

He start for soldier at age fourteen. Nothing get better in White Khmer system;

he so tired. When Pol Pot control, he was Khmer Rouge already. Thirty-four, thirty-five years old then. In Pol Pot time he was head of village. Later he become soldier for Whites again, because run away from Pol Pot, maybe forty years old. Stay in Thailand for refugee seven years. At fifty-five he stop for soldier. Now he is sixty-four.

And what happened when you were head of village?

Under China's orders, Pol Pot must kill. And the people move to refugee camps. And the people move to refugee camps. And the White soldiers run away.

What do you think about Pol Pot?

I never saw him, came the answer, with a ready, toothless grin. Seeing that I was waiting for more, he spoke again, and watched the effect on me with a cautious, cringing air. D. translated: But for himself, he think Pol Pot no good, since always in the jungle.

When my face and voice expressed no displeasure, he brightened again. No mistake about it, he was a professional survivor, this one, who strove always to say and do the ingratiating thing. It might be difficult to learn what he thought about anything.

So you were Khmer Rouge before the Pol Pot time?

Yes, in Lon Nol time. When Lon Nol fight with Sihanouk, he become Red Khmer. And then?

At that time they no have Pol Pot. After that, China they get idea: Pol Pot, you must come into your country to do bad thing against White Khmer.

When you joined the Khmer Rouge, you wanted to be a Communist?

Yes.

What bad things did you see in the Lon Nol time?

Ah, kill the people. Take money and kill. That was Lon Nol way. Dead people go down the river to Thailand, and everybody see.

Can you bring any Reds here?

A big one. Eyes like this. Speak true. If say kill, must kill. Very big one. Cannot bring him; can bring you to him. But he cannot guarantee your life, because no security over there.

If I go to Ban Lung, what are the chances that someone will murder me? I asked Mr. Eagle.

About fifty percent, he said. Even if this big Khmer Rouge give you a guarantee, maybe the Whites will catch you.

(Two weeks later the head of village in Ban Lung was captured and held for ransom, ostensibly by Reds, although later everyone said that Whites masquerading as Reds had done it. When I had D. telephone Mr. Eagle to ask the same question, he replied: Tell him do not go. Now chance of die is ninety percent. So stupid to throw your life for nothing. —I didn't go.)

What is his name?

General Eum.

Can you bring him a letter from us?

The old man grinned and nodded. D. and I quickly dashed off notes to Aum Eum, Khieu Sampan, and Pol Pot, sealing them all in envelopes of different colors: we had to give Pol Pot the red one, of course; since Khieu Sampan's name meant Mr. Green we assigned him that color; General Eum, being red but subordinate, got pink. Perhaps this frivolity had something to do with the failure of our efforts.

What is the aim of the Khmer Rouge?

He don't know. He think take only money now, no politic.

PHNOM PENH (1996)

There were so many cars and motorcycles in Phnom Penh now that I sometimes had to wait up to a minute before jaywalking when and where I pleased. The rickshaw drivers I remembered even from last year, those men in long, dark, greasy shirts which sometimes hung half down to their knees, towering over the shaded cradles in which their cargo of two children or an elegant lady rested, had proportionately dwindled. Doubtless a few had been able to make the move up to motorcycles, and many, many others had simply gone under. Boys in baseball caps leaned low, smoking 555 cigarettes while sucking orange sodas through straws and watching Chinese videos. At every corner now there were gem shops and gold shops. Schoolgirls went home on motorcycles; showgirls came from home. The Vietnamese prostitutes were in the same beauty parlors I remembered from last year and the year before; they laughed and waved me in. It took me at least five minutes of strolling to locate my first one-legged beggar, a former White soldier who doubtless was very fond of the K.R. The boy who sold me a fresh coconut full of juice beamed hopefully: Where you go-uh? Killing field, genocide museum, national museum, national palace?

They had payphones all around the central market now, and even a junk food minimart. The muck of underdevelopment was giving way to the filth of industrial grease.⁹⁶

I had come to meet a former associate of Aum Tit's whom I hoped could give me entrée to the K.R. It was part of the general strangeness of things that this man could leave the Reds without being liquidated by them, could stay in Phnom Penh, the White stronghold, without problems from that corner, and could stay in touch with the Reds, too, so I was told. In the meantime, while waiting for what promised to be an expensive and fruitless luncheon engagement, I decided that I had to raise the topic of the skulls on the shelves one more time. When I had first come to Cambodia, the Vietnamese occupation had ended a mere two years before, and its character had not yet been completely effaced. My translator was surely required to write a report on me, and my driver had also been my sentry of whom I was a little afraid. The State of Cambodia in 1991 had not been quite free. Phnom Penh felt

better now. In Thailand the knowing voices on the fringes of the Khmer Rouge kept telling me that they believed the Vietnamese had killed many or most of the victims attributed to Pol Pot. Now that neither Pol Pot and the Vietnamese could bring too much influence to bear on the Phnom Penh themselves, and now that I'd made some friends over the years who'd begun to trust me, I thought that I could ask them this question: Who had really done it?

What made these researches especially difficult was people's unwillingness to be reminded yet again of the old tragedy. How could I not sympathize? When even the kindest, best-intentioned people presume to open the subject of my sister's death, I feel resentment and pain, whether I express them or not. This is a topic which (so I want to say) only I have the right to raise. Only I was there; you were not; I continue on with my sadness alone. Almost never have I let this feeling dictate my actions, believing as I do in everyone's right to search, question and understand, but still it throbs within me as I brace myself against every new mention, which is to say every new assault. When I mentioned the skulls on the shelves to the pro-Red souls on the Thai side of the border, I'd usually discern a more aggressive cast to their eyes: they were rich people and I was delving into their not very decent business practices, which indignant self-interest roused them to protect. But in Cambodia I saw in the eyes of those I questioned the dull, pathetic anger which I knew so well, as when one commander of a thousand sat in his kitchen for his private after-dinner English class, and because the teacher kept veering from this pupil to ask me, the native speaker, of what consisted the difference between building and apartment, and whether it is better to ask a new acquaintance what is his job or what is his work, and how, if you tell a man "I am her brother," the man can know from this alone whether you are her elder or her younger brother, I felt that it would be appropriate to ask him about his life. He was very poor, the boy replied; his mother, a civil servant, received \$35 a month, which was why he gave lessons for \$20 a month to rich people like this commander of a thousand who sat drinking barley water and listening to us with tired incomprehension. Whom did he live with? I asked, this being a not very intrusive way of finding out how many of his relatives had died. —Well, with his mother, of course, and his father, who was actually his stepfather since in the Pol Pot time...

Why was your father killed? I asked, and got that look I knew so well, and was ashamed.

He was a soldier, said the boy, and Pol Pot, you know he hate the government soldiers so much. By the way, what is a word more strong than "angry" and what is a word less strong than "angry"?

And it was the same when I asked my dear friend Vanny, whom I have come to love almost as if she were a sister, what she would have me ask Pol Pot if I met him. I saw the pain flood into her face and hated myself. It was necessary to do this. It was needful to be absolutely sure, to ask and ask and double-check everything, because

one does not want to make any mistakes when one writes about Tuol Sleng. But I said to myself: I can't do this job much longer. I don't want to be a journalist anymore.

Do you have anything you want me to say to him? I repeated.

At first Vanny shook her head. Finally she said: Just I want to know why. Why he kill the people when he is Cambodian like them.

Vanny had been a little girl when the Khmer Rouge were in power. They'd liquidated many members of her family. She remembered seeing Cambodians beat Cambodians to death with sticks.

Not Vietnamese?

Cambodians did it. Red Khmer.

There was a silence, and then she said: Now I tell my nephew, and he doesn't believe me.

(Time was Pol Pot's secret weapon, as it has been Hitler's—although the latter's victory is posthumous. Just let a new generation come, a generation which has not seen, and it will not, cannot believe. In this restaurant which I remembered very well from the years before it had been filled with air-conditioned luxury and gold fringes and businessmen from China and Singapore with their hand phones and rich Cambodians drinking tea from little porcelain cups with flowers on them, it was hard for me to believe.)

Will you bring your nephew to see Tuol Sleng someday? I asked.

I don't know.

Have you been to Tuol Sleng?

One time.

How did you feel when you saw those things?

She lowered her head, and as I looked at her my eyes began to ooze useless tears.

I can hardly say how I was feeling, she whispered.

I went one time before also, I said. That was the year I first met you. I never wanted to go there again. But since I may be able to meet Pol Pot, I'd better go and take some photographs.

Tuol Sleng is near my house, she said. If you want, I can go with you.

A SMILE

It was pretty much the same as before in that hideous place. I hadn't expected it to be different. The bloodstains on the floor had been scrubbed away or had crumbled away. In the rooms with those evil bed frames, the same black and white photographs were there, the photographs of the dark, rotten, and withered bodies which the Vietnamese had found there after the K.R. fled. Vanny said that when she came there in 1982, the bodies had still been on the beds. They were buried outside now, under white markers.

We gazed together at a photograph of communal labor in the rice fields, and she

said: I remember. I malaria...

I put my arm around her.

She could not stop looking at that photograph. —I do same like that. Too hot, too hot!

The people in the photographs were digging ditches. She whispered: Many many do like this. I malaria...

What did you do when you were sick?

No medicine and no can rest. Only working and so hot.

We looked at the images of torture again, and I asked her: Did you see things like this?

Yes, but I hide...

I asked if I could photograph her, and there in that place where they had tortured her brother to death she faced the camera and politely smiled.

“AND THE ROOF OF MY HOUSE IS BROKEN”

In Phnom Penh I had another friend, a motorcycle driver, a fine man, an intelligent man; I had known him for two years, and because I always paid him well and talked to him as if he were a human being, he liked me and kept my address in his back pocket, although he never wrote to me. At the end of the previous year, as he drove me to the airport, I had confided to him that I was a journalist, and he told me that he supported the Khmer Rouge. I asked him to take me out to find Aum Tit's former colleague, and once we'd begun to speed along, safely isolated from spies and eavesdroppers in our own private Airstream, I asked him how well he knew that fine organization, and he told me that his sister was K.R. He'd gone to visit her once. She lived near Pailin, in a place long controlled by the insurgents. I thought of something that Wall Safe had said to me in Borai when I asked him what the Khmer Rouge's main aim might be. —They must have some area for themselves like Khun Sa the Opium King, some private area for grow rice or something like that. —This my driver's sister seemed already to possess. It had been a two day ride on his motorcycle, and then he'd had to rent another motorcycle and driver which took him into Thailand for about two kilometers and then back into Cambodia, this time into Red Cambodia. (That short excursion to Thailand, which had been necessitated by a minefield, marked the one occasion he had left his country.) He liked the K.R. very much, he said, because they were honest. His sister was happy and living well. She and her husband had two children. Most people in the Red zone were better off than poor people in Phnom Penh, he said.

Better off than you?

Oh, yes, much better.

Why don't you move there then?

It's too far.

What do you think of Khieu Sampan? I asked.

Good something, bad something.

(Vanny had thought that Khieu Sampan was good, but didn't know why she thought so.)

And is Pol Pot good or bad?

Bad, he said. (I knew already that his father had starved to death in the Pol Pot time.)

And the Khmer Rouge are the same as Pol Pot in their behavior, or different?

Different, he said.

I asked him to take me back to Choeung Ek. The journey was briefer than I remembered, perhaps because the roads were better. Flashing past the people sitting television-spellbound in the cafes, we stopped at a gas station where an old beggar-woman shouted desperately; I had given away all my other small money and refused to give, so she began to pinch me and punch me as hard as she could, which wasn't very hard. Then we sped on to the killing fields, passing one Japanese tour bus which was returning from there; the Japanese in the windows looked pale and sickened.

The mass graves were almost filled in now. In another five years they'd be level with the ground. (The guardian said that there were forty more of them nearby, unopened.) There'd been a flood, maybe many floods; the holes were sandy and dirty, with saplings already growing in them, but bend down and you could still gather all the teeth or bone fragments or scraps of women's dresses you could possibly want; I didn't happen to want any. The heavy glass doors to the shelves of skulls were warped now. I could barely open them. I took my photographs, hating the job, hating being back here. The skulls did not smell anymore, and I thought that they had darkened slightly. The motorcycle driver gazed into the mass graves and yawned. He had to bring tourists here almost every week.

What do you think about the killing fields, Thoeun?

Terrible, he said sincerely.

Who do you think killed those people?

They say Khmer Rouge, but I believe only a little. I don't know.

What does your sister think about the killing fields?

She's far from here. So she don't care. She was refugee from Vietnam and came here to Phnom Penh, but no house, no land except for rich people.

But you have a house and land.

No land, he returned with an angry smile. And the roof of my house is broken.

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

That was the thing to remember, that when a guerrilla movement endures and endures, many people must be supporting it. And by supporters I don't just mean the late Mr. Yu Kon of Khlong Yai, or the evil Madame Black-Eyes, or Wall Safe or

the rich boy in Borai, although they did help Pol Pot through their business relations with him; no, I'm thinking about Cambodians like my driver, people who'd experienced the Khmer Rouge terror and who still supported the K.R. Guerrilla war is first and foremost a popularity contest. That was what Mr. White-Shirt had been driving at in Borai, when he'd said that Pol Pot must be a good man if the Khmer Rouge, now in their thirty-third year since Pol Pot and his colleagues had first fled into the jungle, were still going strong. White-Shirt's logic might not be impeccable, but it was not completely wrongheaded, either—I had come to believe that the Opium King possessed some measure of goodness precisely because he was loved and praised by so many; if Pol Pot were loved for his ideology rather than for his wood and gems, then I very much wanted to know why. Thoeun had given me one answer. I did have to admit that since the Khmer Rouge were still alive there must be many, many souls like Thoeun and his sister. —Take, for instance, the woman about whom I wrote earlier, the one I first met in 1991, not Vanny but the other one, the one whose back was seared with round white scars where the K.R. had burned her with an iron bar because she was only nine years old and could not work fast enough. I had been close to her for five years. She'd entrusted her eleven-year-old son to a school in her village, which was far from Phnom Penh; and when I asked whether she'd bring me there to meet him she said that she never could, because it was a Khmer Rouge place. Her family had all been murdered by the K.R.; two years ago she'd told me how much she hated the K.R.; she said she didn't know any K.R., but her village was K.R., and she said that her son was in good hands. Wearisomely strange it all was! —Or consider all the stores which sold gems purporting to come from Pailin; granted, many if not most of them were glass, but how had the real ones gotten here? The merchants claimed that they had bought them in Thailand, but the odd thing was that they were cheaper here than in Thailand, which meant either that the Cambodian merchants could afford a lower markup even after going through at least one extra intermediary, or else (what struck me as more likely) that they were lying and dealt with the K.R. Why not? Everyone else did.⁹⁷ I thought of White-Shirt saying to me at that crying tiger restaurant back in Borai: But if you meet me here in Borai I cannot answer you like this. And I thought of how the White army, 160,000 strong, could not seem to beat the Khmer Rouge, who were estimated to number about 10,000; I thought of how the Whites had lost Pailin a month after they'd conquered it, how they'd lost Anlong Veng a mere three weeks after taking it; the reporter William Shawcross has written flatly: "The present armed forces cannot defeat the Khmer Rouge and they should not be encouraged to try."⁹⁸

From The Cambodia Daily:

DEFENSE SOURCE CITES "CAUTION" IN DRIVE FOR PAILIN

Government forces are in a position where they could "easily" take the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin but are exercising caution in order to avoid a repeat of the 1994 debacle, a Ministry of Defense official said yesterday. "We can occupy Pailin whenever we want," said the official, who asked not to be named. The official added that the government's priority was "not to lose control of the town after it has been seized."⁹⁹

PROSPERITY IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER

And yet Phnom Penh as a whole was indisputably richer every time I came.¹⁰⁰ Was Thoeun richer? I wasn't sure. But if five years from now I saw him driving a taxi instead of a motorcycle, I'd certainly take his complaints with a heaping tablespoon of salt. Right now, yes, he was poor, and compared to me, an American with a decent income by my own country's standards, he would always be poor. But if he ended up no poorer than, say, the average taxi driver in Thailand, then one would have to say that the Pol Pot time no longer pulled him down with its harsh dead hand. I sat in a restaurant I knew, which before had had a dirty concrete floor, and which now was tiled, and I looked across the sunny street at the gas station which in my recent memory had been a vacant lot; and I watched the cars and motorcycles which once had been Russian bicycles traverse my field of vision, and a woman came in to the restaurant holding by the neck a plucked and naked chicken which reminded me of the crazy woman naked from the waist down who had wandered through traffic the day before (Thoeun said that she'd been like that ever since the Pol Pot time), and the fish in that restaurant was more exotically seasoned and tasted better than before, and the central market which I had stared at year after year now bulged with fancier fruits, wristwatches, and gold chains; and the mass graves at Choeung Ek were shallower than before—yes, I know I've described this before, but over and over the skulls on the shelves grin again behind my closed eyes! —I'm going to tell you again that when I bent down I could still grabble easily through the scrap of a woman's dress and the fragment of a man's shirt to find buttons and a human tooth; again I'll tell you that in another five years those shallow craters (in one of which young trees were already growing) might be almost filled in, resembling the forty other unopened mass graves just behind them; by then the pay phones and mini-marts would surely have spread beyond the center of town, and more cyclo and motorcycle drivers would be either richer or out of work, and the city would be louder and I would not be able to see the stars anymore. I cannot forget any of this. Sometimes when you think about something long enough, as a journalist must do to understand, and when you see that thing, that horrible thing, it's there inside you

forever. I will never forget the skulls on the shelves. And I hope that in another five years something won't compel me to see them again. But maybe that's the cure. See them often enough, and I'll become like Thoeun.

A dirt back street I remembered was now paved and crammed with women selling bananas, oranges, and watermelons. A prostitute of my acquaintance who once drank the crimson-brown tap water now imbibed nothing less than filtered hydroxic acid. There were more televisions in the cafes and the apartment balconies had laundry of brighter colors hanging from them. In the bank the clock worked and it was air-conditioned and they even had computers in that place where my companion, for whom I was opening an account, could with great difficulty sign her name.

THE PLEASURES OF EQUALITY

So everything was getting better, and Thoeun was just a sourpuss, and when I hired him to drive me out to dinner at a location chosen by my companion, that woman whose back was seared with round white scars, whom I came to see every year, we bypassed the pleasure district of Chattamak because the government had closed it down; crossing the new Japanese bridge we found upon pilings over what were once marshes a multitude of shining-new Vietnamese restaurants for rich people, replete with lovely made-up hostesses; this was where the woman liked to go now, so what the hell.

Thoeun didn't want to eat at first. He was shy. —Come on, I said. Have you ever eaten here?

Never, he said. I can't make in a day's work what one meal here costs. Sometimes a week's work wouldn't pay it.

Oh yes, he was just being a sourpuss. So what if his roof were broken? Didn't other people have the right to get richer and richer and richer even if he couldn't?

My companion picked at her food. Year by year she was becoming more moody. I got the bill and my heart sank.

That night I dreamed of being chased through a Museum of Death by the paraplegic brother of someone I had killed; he rolled after me on a skateboard and attacked me until I had to kill him, too. The next morning Thoeun took me to get my bluejeans repaired because my companion was embarrassed by the hole in their crotch, and afterward Thoeun went to look in the market for some secondhand socks, but they were almost half a dollar—too much. The next day he waited in front of the hotel all day, but he got only one beautiful Vietnamese whore going back home; she paid him a thousand riels, which was slightly less than the socks would have cost, and that was all he made that day.

Thoeun had a daughter who had gotten the measles shortly after she was born. She was blind in one eye. She was seven now. The doctor said that when she was ten he would cut her eye out, but she was too small right now. She should have been in

school, but Thoeun was afraid that the other children would be mean to her when they saw her eye (she was already so shy), so he had decided to keep her at home until her operation. He was already worried about how much it might cost, and the used motorcycles he bought for his job generally lasted only about eleven months, by which time they were barely paid off. I worried about him, too. Every year I paid him quite a bit more than I needed to, which was one of the reasons that he liked me and trusted me. He was extraordinarily intelligent and, self-taught, had learned to speak better English than any other Khmer I'd met in Phnom Penh, so I thought to help him by introducing him to Vanny and her brother, saying that he would make a splendid teacher, but they felt awkward together, I think because they were rich and he was poor...

Vanny and her family had given me dinner again this year, several times, so I finally offered to take them out. It was an expensive, gloomy restaurant that they picked; I forget whether they said it was the most expensive in Phnom Penh or the second most expensive. Anyhow, it had just opened. Dancing girls sang far away from the diners' tables. Many rich White soldiers toasted me with cheers all the time.¹⁰¹ My companion, whose presence offended them on account of her poverty and her profession, was sulky all evening, and scarcely said a word. Later she remarked that for what I'd paid I could have given her uncle an eye operation. I thought of Thoeun's daughter, whom I would much rather have given an eye operation to, and said nothing.

Do you think you'll get a victory over the Khmer Rouge soon? I asked Vanny's brother, the commander of a thousand.

Why don't you ask Sihanouk? his wife replied snappishly.

I will the next time I see him.

It all depends on him, said the commander of a thousand. Cheers!

ADVERTISEMENTS

Outside the hotel the motorcycle drivers were fighting over me as usual, and one of them thought that his rival was about to make a sale (wrongly, in fact, because I was loyal to Thoeun), he shouted at me: You must not go with him, because he is a Khmer Rouge defector! Fighting us, year after year! And then the government offered him small money, so he sold himself!

Don't listen; he's crazy! pleaded the sweaty one.

No, it's true! He sold himself for small money, and now he likes Vietnamese girls! (In Cambodia, this was the ultimate insult.)

No, no—don't believe him!

You must not go with him. He is Khmer Rouge.

A BANQUET

Aum Tit's ex-colleague, the Khmer Rouge general now come ambiguously in from the cold, was another Aum (which means Uncle), so we will call him Aum Sambath, although that was not his name. He lived with a Thai businessman who was a good friend of Wall Safe's back in Borai; Wall Safe had arranged the introduction. Since he happened to be an uncle, too (for uncle is what we must call the old men we respect), let us call him Aum Sasong. Aum Sasong dwelled in one of those Z-shaped dirt alleys of bamboo houses and suckling puppies and English schools whose sole accoutrements were blackboards on which the two or three English sentences never changed, with the possible exception of the one which said: *Today is...* The house of Aum Sasong, in short, was poor, which surprised me because the house in which I'd met his son in Borai was quite rich. Aum Sasong had a plantation near Phnom Penh, to which he wanted to bring me, but I didn't want to go, because it would have taken all day to get there over very bad roads, and I had a fever again (when I looked at my face in the mirror it was so red and swollen that I almost thought my ears would fall off), and, above all, I could not see any point to going when I had not even met Aum Sambath yet. Instead, I did the lazy noble thing; I invited everyone out to lunch, specifically including the invisible Aum Sambath in my invitation. Wall Safe had warned me: Khmer Rouge trust you only when they are full. When they are little bit hungry, they trust you, but only for the short time. When very hungry, cannot be your friend. —So I figured that I had better feed Aum Sambath very well.

With Aum Sasong at the table were his wife, a dumpy elderly lady with a tired expression who said nothing and to whom nothing was said; their son, who obviously longed to be elsewhere, a grim personage of about forty with crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes; and another middle-aged man in a police uniform. One of them might perhaps be Aum Sambath; or it was possible that in spite of my invitation he hadn't come at all. As my mother always says, you never know in life. Thoeun sat beside me; he was my interpreter. Everyone was polite to him until they figured out that he was just a motorcycle driver. Then they stopped talking to him.

The policeman had come straight from the office to dine at my expense. He recommended the grim-faced one as his neighbor. On the back of his hand the policeman bore a scar about the size and shape of a wristwatch dial. It was the same story as that of my companion with the white scars on her back: the Khmer Rouge had seared him with a heated iron bar for working too slowly. Toward the end of the Pol Pot time, the policeman had managed to flee to Thailand, from whence he was not repatriated for more than a decade. His wife and two children had remained in Battambang, where the Khmer Rouge had brought them in the urban exodus. He asked me where I was from, and I said the United States. He said that it was his fondest desire to go there; would I please bring him?

And should I bring your wife and children also? I asked. That would be

very expensive.

Only me, only me, he whispered frantically. (I had to hand it to D. She knew about war character.)

He said that his salary was not large enough for him to buy the regulation pistol.

When he requested my address, which I gave him, I asked him in return, and thus verified what I had suspected from his torture scar, that he was not Aum Sambath. But the grimfaced personage proved to be the one I sought. He wore a ring of gold whose massiveness approached that of the policeman's scar. He had a calm, cruel, self-assured face, which could have been that of a Serbian bully or that of one of the New York ghetto blacks who'd burned my arm with a cigarette lighter. Very, very different, this one, from the scared boys in T-3 Prison! I was afraid of him.

Wall Safe had warned me that I must tell everyone that I had been his good friend for ten years; otherwise Aum Sambath would never trust me. He had written a testimonial to our long deep friendship, which I'd presented to Aum Sasong. But Aum Sambath didn't trust me anyway. He started quizzing me about Wall Safe's family. Fortunately I knew the name of Wall Safe's wife; she'd stuck in my memory as much for her ill nature as for her extreme beauty, and I'd never forget the sight of her counting those lavender rubies out of plastic bags. *The Taming of the Shrew* came into my head, so I went on and on to Aum Sambath about how gracious and friendly she was. He was hardly convinced. He wanted to know where and how I'd met Wall Safe, and why it was that in my ten years of deep friendship with Wall Safe and his family I had never once met him, Aum Sambath—why, in fact, Aum Sambath had never until now heard a single mention of me. Doubtless he was also wondering how it was that Wall Safe and I expressed to one another our sacred sentiments of intimacy when I couldn't speak Thai and Wall Safe couldn't speak English. Fearing to get strangled in my own lies, I droned on about the greatness of Wall Safe's heart, instructing wise Thoeun to amplify my remarks at length. He grunted ironically. The policeman helped himself to more fish. Aum Sasong's family looked bored. I deemed it less than opportune to press my suit any further at that less than private lunch.

Aum Sambath was, among other things, a well established member of the gem merchantry. He advised me not to buy any stones in Phnom Penh. I asked him if he had ever been to Pailin (where, of course, he'd been for years), and he said sourly: Many times. Not long ago. —To fully appreciate this, one must imagine that we were in Washington, D.C. during World War II and I was taking out a lunch an industrialist (Aum Sasong), a Jewish refugee from torture (the policeman), and a general, and the general said that he had been to Berlin many times, and not so long ago, either. The battle-lines, in short, were more than permeable.

After dessert, Aum Sasong invited me to come with him to see his durian plantation, which lay three or four hours away. I made what might have been a mistake of cowardice: I declined. I figured that either Aum Sambath wouldn't come, or else

I wouldn't be alone with Aum Sambath, and after that lunch my apprehension about being considered a spy was high. Vanny had warned me that I was in danger of being blackmailed by the Whites or executed by the Reds at that lunch. Aum Sambath clearly did not swallow my feeble story. After the others had gone, I had Thoeun take me to stationery, where I bought the most elegant message-vehicle available, namely, a red and gold card in honor of the Chinese New Year, now approaching; and upon that card I respectfully requested Aum Sambath to introduce me to someone who knew Pol Pot. I asked him please to tell the bearer of this message when I might expect a reply. Thoeun translated the note into Khmer on the facing page. Then, while I lay low at Vanny's, so that Aum Sasong's family would not think that anything strange were going on, Thoeun got on his motorcycle, delivered the card to Aum Sambath, whom he fortunately found alone, and waited. He told me later that Aum Sambath read my card expressionlessly, turned to him, and said: Very well. You may go.

ARANYAPRATHET, SAKEO PROVINCE, THAILAND (1996)

And now my time and money were running out, and the closest relative to a Red Khmer I had met had been Aum Sambath, whom I could not really describe as helpful. I had one more chance. I could either go to Battambang, and try to meet the K.R. there, or else soldier on in Thailand. I elected to stick with Thailand to the bitter end, because despite my lack of success so far it still struck me that the safest place to meet Reds, both for them and for me, was outside their country and away from the minefields. If I made friends and received an invitation to view some charming little ambush, well and good, but until that happened it would be suicidal to wander aimlessly. I had learned by now what Pol Pot did to cadres who spoke with journalists; doubtless exceptions were often made, but I did not yet know how to be an exception. I was still hoping for good news from Ban Lung—oh, I had my expectations as poorly crafted as the multicolored children's backpacks which hung in the open doorways of Khlong Yai's dry goods shops! — but when I met D. at the airport in Bangkok she reported that we had received no reply from Aum Eum, and that the head of village in Ban Lung had been seized and held for ransom by false Reds (who later turned out to be White bandits; after the money was paid and he was released, the head of village, so I was told, hunted them down and killed them). At any rate, the old Khmer who'd delivered our letter to Aum Eum, and the head of village who'd introduced us to the old Khmer, were both afraid to go to Ban Lung now. The head of village said he did not know how he could help us further. As for Wall Safe, he had tired of trying to help us. He was now buying gems at the Burmese border anyhow. The rich boy had been unable to

get his ten trucks back. He no longer used his hand phone, he said, because the K.R. kept making threatening calls. Accordingly, it did not seem worthwhile for D. and me to return to Khlong Yai or Borai, although I did miss that haunt of off-duty police in Borai, the crying tiger restaurant, which made not only crying tiger but also a special dish of pan-fried garlic, beef, and basil all crispy and crunchy, mixed in red chili pods as long as my thumb which were screamingly delicious. However, I was not supposed to be writing the Michelin Guide, but interviewing mass murderers. Where to go, where to go? There was always hot and dreary Chantaburi Province, with its plantations of pepper plants on sticks; but even D. alone, charming and well-connected though she was, had been unable to cross the border there. Forget it. I proposed that we visit Aranyaprathet.

PROGRESS

The red rocks and dust which I remembered so well from 1991, when I'd tried to sneak across the border and failed, were still the same; I saw again sandaled people wheeling immense carts, but the merchants' dens, once just open-air flimflam stalls on a long zigzaggy lane of red dust and barbed wire, were becoming permanent now; long barracks-like concrete blocks had sprung up, sprouted awnings and tiled floors, and subdivided themselves into walled spaces which could be put to bed at night behind steel shutters; new blocks were in construction. Here it all was: phony sapphires and occasionally real ones from Pailin, secondhand shirts, uniforms, and jeans with the body odor still in them, California raisins, Vietnamese model ships, and Chinese china. The storekeepers and restaurateurs watched from behind those multicolored awnings, and the beggars and buyers, soldiers and schemers; the beggars and schemers in their turn chose their own particular slit of clean or fetid sunlight and glued their eyeballs on their victims. Here came the Cambodian girl whose face was all nose. She smiled at me today. I tried to get her a plate of rice, but she was too shy. A Cambodian woman was following me. She kept a feeble green bird half-stifled inside her hat; she was hoping I'd buy it for two hundred baht. (Whenever I interviewed anyone, she came as close as she could, straining to listen.) A filthy, bald little Cambodian urchin grabbed at my hand and strained to keep me; I whirled him gently around my waist while his friend attempted to pick my pocket. People told me that more and more Cambodian businessmen were establishing themselves over here, which I thought at first to be a sign of Cambodia's increasing prosperity, which it surely was, but there was another reason: Poipet on the Khmer side was too dangerous. It was the Thais who had the money to buy, and they didn't like to go to Cambodia anymore. The aging karaoke singer whose vagina cost five thousand¹⁰² per night didn't go to Poipet anymore. For one thing, she felt it more advisable to use the daytime to catch up on her sleep. She said that the White generals came from time to time; lately, however, they hadn't come, because they

were busy fighting Reds. Sometimes the Cambodian prostitutes got past the checkpoints; she knew them by their makeup. Some of them seemed nice, but you really couldn't trust any of them; that was the Cambodian character. She'd never seen any Reds (but of course the Reds would have breezed in and passed themselves off as Whites). Yes, this was the border at Aranyaprathet, changed and not changed. One morning a hundred black-uniformed soldiers descended from a bus and strolled everywhere, shopping. They had to go to a secret destination in one hour, a soldier said. I remembered them from last time. One warned me to watch my wallet, and I said: Thank you, sir.

Soon D. and I saw the first one-legged little girl of the day; then we met an eleven-year-old boy whose arm was sickeningly scarred from elbow to wrist: accident from mine, he said.

I wanted to go to Poipet, but once again the Thai border police wouldn't let me. So I sent D. across (in case you haven't figured it out by now, this is D.'s story, not mine; without her I could have done nothing), and sat down to wait, surrounded by ragged dirty Khmer boys who were hoping to get work that day. Thai soldiers, possibly wanting to help me, came and shooed most of them away.

You like Sihanouk? I asked them.

Very very good.

Hun Sen?

Good.

Khieu Samphan?

Very bad.

Pol Pot?

Very very bad.

I am hunger today, whispered my main respondent, Mr. Blueberry, and I motioned him to follow me so that I could buy him lunch but at once a whole troop of them began to follow, and when I stopped to photograph a one-legged White soldier they all dispiritedly vanished.

After an hour or so, D. returned to me, pale and shocked. She said that when she'd arrived at Poipet Market, where everything was old and dirty, she saw White soldiers yelling at each other over some fish and waving machine guns in each other's faces. These soldiers had themselves been hired by the fish merchants to keep the Immigration men from extorting more than their fair share of the fish. D. was very, very afraid.¹⁰³

From The Cambodia Daily:

TWO DEAD, ONE INJURED IN FISH HEAD DISPUTE

Two Cambodian soldiers were killed and the wife of one wounded in a fight over fish heads...¹⁰⁴

STATEMENT OF THE DRIVER

Our new driver, a chunky, middle-aged specimen from whose mirror the garland for Buddha hung wilted, thought that the K.R. were very good. It was the old story: —They always speak true for business, he said. One price. (I thought of the rich boy's trucks. But maybe those robbers were different K.R.) And same like American style, he went on enthusiastically. If they say ten o'clock, you must come ten o'clock or they go. They don't like waiting.

I had learned that Thais who liked the Reds usually didn't like the Whites. The driver fell into this mold. He had once been involved in some gold business with the Reds, but the Whites kept shaking him down. The last straw came when he was doing a dinnerplate business with the Whites and then the border suddenly closed at a time when he happened to owe the Whites money. They took it out on his sister.

STATEMENT OF THE DRIVER'S SISTER

This mountainous woman sat barefoot and cross-legged on a platform in her hot, dim shop which sold plates from China. The King and Queen hung overhead in oval frames. The woman smiled warmly, and I saw that she was missing teeth.

What happened exactly?

Some Cambodia tell her come look our shop. When she go to look inside, they don't let her go. They catch her in Poipet Market and bring her to some house. They say: We don't let you go until we get some money. And then, two Cambodia working with her here in Thailand go inside, try to help her. And the driver come. They said: If you don't give money, cut, amputate your sister. Make for driver afraid.

And how did they treat you?

Take care. They just need money. Business person.

The two who caught you were soldiers?

Just normal person.

With guns?

They just say: Oh, you come here for business. Then keep. No way to run away, because she get fat.

They were White or Red?

White.

Which of the two do you think is worse?

She don't know who good.

How long did you stay in that house?

Three months.

What did you do there?

Nothing. Nothing to do.

How do you feel about it now?

Unhappy now. After that she don't want to control too much business. Get angry even now.

But you still do business with the people who kidnapped you?

Yes. Do business.

Do you still go to Poipet now?

Never go again.

(She had to whisper all this, insofar as she was capable of whispering, since the ones she did business with might hear, and then something bad would happen to her again, even in Thailand.)

Can they catch you here?

Cannot in Thailand, she whispered fearfully, looking out the door.

When they let you go, what did you say to them?

The woman raised one flipper-like arm in a hieratic gesture. —She say to them thank you. Say nothing more.

STATEMENT OF THE DRIVER (CONTINUED)

So the driver didn't like the Whites much. He said that there was shooting just across the border every day—you could hear it from Thailand—and some of it was White against White, but mostly it was Red against White. He said that we could go to the hospital in Aranyaprathet any time and see the victims.

So most of the shooting comes from the Reds?

Yes.

But you think the K.R. are good?

Oh, very good. Very good for business.

And what about all the people missing one leg? Are those mines laid by the Reds or the Whites?

Mainly the Reds.

And you don't feel sad for them?

Before, a little bit sad, but see so many that now it become normal.

He took us to the hospital to inspect that day's crop. Cambodians could come there for free if they didn't have money. Nobody new in the men's ward, but in the women's side there lay a young bride whose face was still somewhat pretty; she'd been cutting grass with two other girls, and one of them had stepped on a mine. The bride was the only survivor. No legs anymore. Her husband stood beside her bed, unmoving. I don't think the girl had realized yet what had happened to her, and how her life would be from now on. Maybe next year I'd see her on crutches, swinging herself wearily down some muddy street. I hoped that she was clever with her hands. If not, how would she be able to support herself?

But enough of these sad reflections not worthy of an amoral information-seeker; after all, the land mine that maimed that girl and killed her friends was nothing

personal! You can't blame Pol Pot or the Whites for that—why, they didn't even know her! What was it that Madame Black-Eyes had said back in Khlong Yai? *But that was just politics*. Indeed, that was all it was.

MR. SPEED

The border boy had a gold tooth, and he wore a cap which proudly advertised a brand of liquid speed. D. and I brought him to a cheap noodle place and he could not stop eating. He said that he never ate this well at home in Cambodia, and as a matter of fact he hadn't had any food all day. He was a White deserter. —Three months, D. translated, and always fighting, so he run away. He said, always when they fighting, Thai soldier help Khmer Rouge to fight against the Whites.

Why?

He don't know. Maybe the big White know, because they say each other, don't talk, keep quiet.

Does he know any Reds?

The boy smiled and nodded, and I began to hope. He was not afraid.

He say, Red Khmer very difficult to remember face, because always put hat low like this, because cannot see. Even shooting you never know who is who. But Khmer Rouge they wear only one uniform, just dark green.

Can you find one of them for us?

It's far to find them.

How far?

Only three kilos, but then they shoot me, grinned the boy.

So how can we meet a Red Khmer?

If I go to see Red, they shoot me. If I give them come here, then White shoot them, because they remember face.

He wiped his face with a wad of toilet paper. He smelled very bad. Dark, dirty, and large-eared, he scratched at the white eczema or fungus between his fingers. I was already beginning to trust him, because he spoke simply and directly. He said: If they come, they come in evening time. Just come to border, look for news. They come to Poipet eight o'clock, nine o'clock evening, like spy, then go back to camp. One hour after, come again shooting.

Tell him that if he can find a Red for us, we'll give him something.

He know that already! Sometimes falang very stupid thinking, Bill! This is like *idiot!* (I was reading Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* at that time, and D. was very proud of knowing this new word.) Of course he know! But he say, before he have two friends K.R., and when Whites know, they catch his two friends and kill.

Well, does he have any more K.R. friends left, or have they all been bumped off?

He say okay. Tomorrow morning time. What o'clock you want?

CHOREOGRAPHY

We went to the karaoke restaurant to listen to the singer whose vagina was worth five thousand baht complain about Cambodians again. (The sheen of incandescent light on concrete, that's the color of night in Thai cities.) The next day we met Mr. Speed at the appointed hour. Two other smiling Khmers dogged us all the way to the open-air restaurant, one at each of my elbows, and when we got there they made as if to come in with us, so we had to sit down outside with Mr. Speed and wait for them to go away, which they didn't. So we sat on, partaking of vinegar and grease.

Finally I sent our driver to put his arm around the boy and walk him in, blocking the others with his considerable bulk. We bought the boy breakfast while the two jealous followers stood ten feet away beaming at me and straining their ears. I beamed back at them. Then they glowered. I winked. They gazed at me with hatred. I smiled and saluted, and they saluted me back.

Mr. Speed said: That blue one followed me everywhere, try to know me.

And what happened?

Mr. Speed grinned modestly, running a tongue over a gold tooth.

He bring K.R. cross the border by the secret way four o'clock morning. And he bring White also to guarantee not shoot him.

Good work, Mr. Speed. Have another breakfast.

When he couldn't eat another bite, we proceeded past the rancid body-stench of the secondhand clothing shops toward our rendezvous, a certain shop in the driver's control, and the two boys followed us. At one point Mr. Speed doubled his fist at them, but after a silent scuffle he gave in to their presence.

So how did you pull it off, Mr. Speed?

He go to White, D. translated laughing, and White radio to Red, invite them! Oh, Bill, you and I must be very careful this place. Crazy, eh?

We had neared the shop. I told the driver to go with Mr. Speed while D. and I sat in another restaurant, so that our poor followers, Mr. Blue and Mr. Green, wouldn't know whom to pursue. Mr. Green wandered off finally in search of other prey. But Mr. Blue smelled a business transaction about to take place. He would not leave us. When D. and I finally arose, he strode miserably along beside us, then suddenly seemed to realize that he'd been tricked, and dashed off at full speed in search of Mr. Speed.

Ah, the driver knew how to arrange things! Fellow journalists, treasure your drivers, for they are as gods. No one could stop us. In the shop, D. and I sat on sacks of multicolored plastic cord, far enough away from the doorways on either side so that Mr. Blue and his cronies, of which there were now several, could not hear. Another contact of mine, whom after his cap we'll call Mr. Capitol, had now arrived on the scene to discuss certain arrangements I'll tell you about later, so I parked him in the restaurant with an unlimited meal ticket. The driver motioned us to wait;

everything seemed in the bag until Mr. Speed came creeping up to me so forlorn, and whispered that his Red friend had run away in terror when he saw the driver's hand phone, thinking that maybe the driver was police...Mr. Blue had run off and come back again, and was now nosing hungrily around and around the shop, gazing at me like a shark, while Mr. Speed stood in a patch of sunlight on the street, waiting to become fifteen minutes older. I went out and had one of Mr. Blue's colleague take a photo of me with my arm around Mr. Blue's shoulders, just so that I could say I'd done it. There was a girl with no nose whom over the days we'd spent at the border I'd become fond of; I tried to get her to come into the picture, too, but she wouldn't. I thanked Mr. Blue profusely for being in the portrait, went back into the shop, sent D. on a stroking mission to Mr. Capitol, bought the driver a beer, slipped Mr. Speed twenty baht to cross the border and bring back his Red friend with a guarantee of full diplomatic immunity from the driver's hand phone, and awaited further plot-thickenings.

“POL POT IS JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR KHMER ROUGE”

Here he came at last, a skinny dirty boy just like all the others in T-3 except that he was free. Call him Mr. Red, for he was the genuine article. He was also the first Khmer Rouge I met outside of T-3 who was willing to talk to me. I was thrilled.

How many are there in your family? I asked him.

He's the number one brother, D. interpreted, and he has father, mother. Father die from sickness. Poor family. Mother selling vegetables at home.

How did he join?

He talk with someone he know. Difficult to be K.R. First time he become working with K.R., move heavy things for money. Not yet ten years old. Per day, he get twenty-fifty baht.¹⁰⁵ And someone tell him, you become to K.R., it's better.

Did he tell his mother he'd become Khmer Rouge?

He don't tell.

If he had told her, what would she have thought?

Angry, and doesn't like.

Why?

Don't let him die. But very very poor family. Must do.

(I am sure that Pol Pot would approve if in this context I quoted from Chairman Mao again: *Poverty inclines one to change, action and revolution.*)¹⁰⁶

When did he join?

At ten years old he join. Go to fighting in Sdao, Treng Province. Now he's twenty-three. But maybe he little bit confused, Bill. From gun, earthquake voice make trouble in his head, so cannot remember some things. He come to Khmer Rouge, but nothing. Can get nothing. He have salary like eight hundred a month.¹⁰⁷ Some day food, some day no food.

How many people did you kill for the Khmer Rouge? I asked him directly.

He kill fifteen Whites. Fifteen people die from him. He shooting, and the people he kill were eighteen, nineteen years old. He only ten!

What kind of gun did he use?

Ah Ka.

The first time he killed someone, what did he think?

The boy touched his heart. He spoke quickly and firmly. —He was so sad for them. Because Khmer together.

Then why did you kill them?

Because shooting together. If I don't kill them, they kill us.

In the Khmer Rouge did they ever talk to you about politics?

Nobody even teach me about shooting gun, he said bitterly, but I learn myself.

So they didn't teach you any ideas at all?

Like a big general come to teach: We are Khmer Rouge now. If someone come to spy, don't let them still alive. Every try to be good Khmer Rouge.

What is a good Khmer Rouge?

Try to be Khmer Rouge soldier from your heart. No teach for the politic. Just try to catch the spy, talk a little bit, ask for what do you come, then kill.

(He was a very friendly smiling boy.)

Do you understand the word "Communist"?

He looked puzzled, thought for a long while. —It mean Khmer Rouge.

What does it mean to you?

He like a republic system. He don't know too much about it.

Who is the head of the Khmer Rouge?

Khieu Samphan.

What do the big generals say about him?

He don't know. Never say.

Have you ever heard the name Pol Pot?

He don't know. Pol Pot is just another word for Khmer Rouge. Maybe not a person. But if a person, Pol Pot always have a black uniform, and wear red fabric on head and wear shoes from rubber. But he never see.

Well, is Pol Pot a person or just a name for the Khmer Rouge?

He don't know.

(And so once again, I thought, Pol Pot evaded understanding or judgment; even to his own followers he remained the faceless one, the great emptiness walking in rubber sandals. De Gaulle once said to Sihanouk that "authority requires prestige, and prestige requires remoteness."¹⁰⁸ Here was remoteness with a vengeance.)

They say that Pol Pot killed a lot of people one time. Is that true or not?

When he was Khmer Rouge, he never heard about it. He stay with K.R. until age eighteen. After he walk out from soldier, then he hear Pol Pot kill the people.

And is that true or not?

He say true.

Does he think that Khmer Rouge want to kill the people again, or have they changed?

Now is killing, even now!

Who is better, Red or White?

White.

Why?

He clasped his fingers, became confused. I suspected that he was telling me what he wanted me to hear. I didn't believe that he was a defector. If he was, he wouldn't have been so afraid of the driver's hand phone. He wouldn't have crossed the border at four in the morning. —Better for the system of planning, he said finally. White is better. People don't have to stay in jungle.

And the Whites never kill anyone?

No.

Which is better to do business with, Red or White?

White.

And which is stronger?

Now is White more stronger than Red, because White control big city; impossible Red catch that area.

(That was true.)

When you ran away from the Khmer Rouge, were they angry with you?

He said he cannot come back to Khmer Rouge anymore, because if he do they must kill him, say spy for White.

Did he tell them, or just run away?

Run away. After become member, must be member eternally.

Did you ever set land mines?

Many time he see them, but he never put.

Who set them?

White.

MR. CAPITOL

And now, since I've been keeping Mr. Capitol waiting, let me pause to introduce him. The previous day I'd seen Mr. Blueberry among a crowd of would-be laborers; and when I asked him to please come with me to talk with me and D., he said simply: No. In the throng was another young Khmer whose cap read CAPITOL. He spoke almost perfect English, quickly and confidently, with an American southern accent. He'd gone to the U.S. for three illegal years, so he said, had gone to Bangkok illegally by walking seven days through the forest. Like Mr. Speed, he was a deserter from the Whites. He assured me that over a period of ten days he'd swallowed poisons mixed with wine, and now he was invulnerable to war. I wanted to put him

to the test with one bullet, but he said that while the bullet wouldn't hurt him, every such experiment would shorten his life by three months. He said that in the nighttime he'd once saved his comrades, because a spirit had woken him up and he'd heard the Khmer Rouge coming. He'd been a gunner then. He couldn't remember the name of the ordnance he'd fired, but it sounded like light artillery. It was from China, weighed two hundred pounds, and required three men to lift it. When he fired it, his ears bled. Once he had to fire it for three days running, and after that he was deafened for ten days and had to go to the hospital.

He had a warm affect, and moved and spoke most agilely. D. thought him very wise on account of his upslanting eyes. He was as positive about everything as all the waitresses in Trat Province who'd said that Cambodians didn't respect property, couldn't be trusted, as all the Madame Black-Eyes in Khlong Yai, who'd said that the Reds were great; I have always adored certainty. He reminded me of a corner drug pusher. Everything he said was optimistic. He assured me that I could cross the border to Poipet quite easily, which I knew already to be false. Then he said that he could bring us illegally to Cambodia in all smoothness. All we had to do was rent a car, put him in the trunk, and drive by a certain way he knew to the river. Were there Thai checkpoints? Oh, no. He was sure? Well, there were Thai soldiers and they would check us, but that was not a checkpoint, exactly. And then we'd just cross the river and be in Cambodia. If we gave the Whites twenty baht apiece when we got to the other side, they'd be more than satisfied. And then a mere twenty miles or so would bring us to the mountain where they shot the big guns. When they fired them, he said, it was like an earthquake (the same description that Mr. Red had used). The whole ground shook.

I wanted to know more about this illegal border crossing, having determined to follow the principle set forward so elegantly by the KGB, that "one should be especially aware of a collaborator's influence upon one and his exploitation. Although one should maintain close and delicate relations with a collaborator, one's demands as the communication of investigatory material and intolerance of provocation must be absolute."¹⁰⁹ My last few experiences on the Thai border had made me less than blithe. Nothing to it, Mr. Capitol assured me. There was a temple on the Thai side; you went in the front and came out the back, so that the Thais didn't see. Then you crossed the river.

What if the soldiers notice? I said.

No problem, said Mr. Capitol. One soldier, two soldiers against me, I can handle it. I been through all that. I been through all the jails.

Glad to hear it, I said.

See, this is my other idea that I'm trying to explain. You and her drive me to the temple. And I go the secret way, I meet you at the temple, and bring you into Cambodia.

I repeated all this slowly to D., who translated for the driver, who shook his head and laughed.

Draw me a map, I said.

Mr. Capitol did.

Remember, please, my husband is falang, said D. It's dangerous for him or not?

Not the secret way, said Mr. Capitol. I been through all those fights.

He bowed his cap low and lit a cigarette.

No problem, he went on. If we meet one or two Thais, we can handle 'em. We got backup. Many bazookas, 'cause a lot of drug dealers over there steal cars from Thailand, smuggle weed. If you want some weed or some crack, I can fix you up.

So which do you like better, Mr. Capitol, weed or crack?

Oh, I don't go for none of that stuff. I do the car thing. Give 'em a thousand bee,¹¹⁰ whisk 'em off to Cambodia. I just do my business. Nobody talks. Anything happens, I can handle. I been in the army three years. I can smell people comin'. I can eat birds, eat rats.

Well, I said, let D. and me think about it.

VERIFYING MY SOURCES

We stood at the roadside with Mr. Capitol's map and I flagged down a *tuk-tuk*. It was a big, old-fashioned tuk-tuk which reminded me of a riding lawn mower topped by an awning. The old driver's windbreaker billowed up around his shoulders. In the two lozenge-shaped mirrors I saw his double face, steady and old in the wind. He said that there was a route that went ten kilometers to a certain temple, which must have been Mr. Capitol's temple as I ascertained by comparing the way we actually went with Mr. Capitol's sketch-map. He warned us that there would be many checkpoints. Twenty kilos farther on was a village filled with Reds, but we could not go there, so I said never mind; we'd settle for the temple.

We made a right just before the border market and followed a long flat dusty road which paralleled the frontier, meeting checkpoints every minute or two. Soldiers in camouflage looked up from color televisions, pulled strings, and raised their red-and-white barrier poles, acquiescently for the most part, because it was a Sunday afternoon and the big brass weren't looking over their shoulders and they did not want to be bothered. The checkpoints were sometimes actual huts and sometimes mere cutaway shacks shored up with sandbags. But as we proceeded, the soldiers within those stations assumed an increasingly serious character. They began to stop and question us; then they required us to write our names on a sheet of paper, which D. did in Thai, hoping that if they transliterated my appellation it wouldn't come out quite the same as in the other places where we were "in control"; meanwhile their equipment also became more formidable. At the final checkpoint they had bunkers and grenade launchers. The driver stopped to pick up a local woman, who told us that she heard shooting every day; sometimes the Cambodians shot directly over the border into her village she said. Red or White? I asked, and she

shrugged. —A cop followed us on a motorcycle to the temple where D., pretending to be my tour guide, had brought me. A monk was striking the drum with steady ominous booms, as I peered through the razor-wire behind the temple and saw a shallow dirty-green river bridged by stepping-stones; the other side was Cambodia, just as Mr. Capitol had said. I stood looking, and I did not like it. Two Thai soldiers with machine guns had now come up behind us, and in Cambodia a soldier came from a grass shack, saw me, half-crossed the river, and called to me in a friendly voice, seeking to lure me into his clutches. Two more Whites came running down to join him and gazed at me with wolfish eyes.

If they catch you, first they keep you, no food no water, said a monk, then you must pay big money to come back, or else they kill you.

Quickly, we must go back quickly! D. whispered to me urgently. Thai soldier make report; soon we must be in control again!

We got back in the tuk-tuk and left. A shot boomed from across the river—a Khmer Rouge 120 mm. mortar round. We heard shots intermittently all the way back to the market.

So much for Mr. Capitol and his bright ideas, I said to D. The next day I gave him some money to go and bring us an antitank mine and a special K.R. uniform which he guaranteed to be magically impervious to bullets,¹¹¹ and he never came back.

A BOGEYMAN AND A BARBECUED DOG

Our other driver, who was really very good and well worth the eight hundred baht¹¹² we paid him every day, knew a police general whom he thought was OK. The man lived in a concrete alley of gratinged porches well lit by the white shining of incandescent tubes. He was not back from Cambodia yet. His wife arose from her sewing machine and took the family motorcycle to find out when he might return. When she came back, she said that he would probably be late, so I took D. back to the karaoke bar where I always drank soda-water every night, and I'd just started to carve another woodcut of a singer who was wearing a dress tricked out with pearls when the driver came to fetch us. The police general was home now, and willing to see us, because he too belonged to the species of zealous businessmen.¹¹³ When I met him, I liked him far more than I did Mr. Gold. He never asked how much we could pay him. He was invariably cheerful and polite, unlike Mr. Gold, who respected D. but considered me trash and never in the entire time I knew him permitted me to say a single thing to him directly without cutting me off and beginning to chat with D. On that night the police general was sitting outside, bare to the waist, eating meatballs and drinking beer. The wife was sewing again. They had a son, perhaps five years old, who happily prowled about, whittling a new notch in his homemade rubber-band launcher. The police general offered us meatballs, but I was not hungry, and D. had been nauseous all day; she was a vegetarian anyway.

The police general said that this year the fighting between Reds and Whites had begun on the twentieth of January. It was now Valentine's Day, and from here in Aranyaprathet down along the border to Trat, over a hundred Whites had died already, but only a few Reds. Every year they fought from January to June, and then they took a break until the fall. It was like *cha-cha-cha*, he said with a sunnily cynical grin. (He obviously got around; he had experience. He knew how to dial 555 on his walkie-talkie and listen in on the White fighting, although they changed the frequency every hour.) In the summer, he said, the Whites conquered Red territory, and in the winter it was the reverse. He said that two days ago in Battambang the Reds had been allowed to win, and they captured some equipment from the Whites. The next day the Whites won, capturing back their gear along with an equal array of Red weapons. They sold their booty to private bidders and split the profits with the Reds fifty-fifty. It was difficult for the Reds to come into town to sell anything, so they were quite happy with this arrangement. The Whites were happy, too, because they were poorer than the Reds and needed money.

The police general admired the Red system a good deal. In the K.R. area, students went to school, the women did their thing at home, and the soldiers fought. That was how life should be. The Whites had no system, he said, no law.¹¹⁴ He showed me a color photograph he'd taken the day before yesterday of a bleeding man. The soldiers of two adjacent White checkpoints had opened up on each other in some commercial dispute probably not too dissimilar to the one which D. had seen building when she went to Poipet Market that day. He showed me a photograph of a parched plain on which a skinny and desperate family of Cambodians were barbecuing a dead dog. They had nothing else to eat, they'd told him. On the White side, said the police general, one was either obscenely rich (and I recollected all those new restaurants in Phnom Penh) or else one starved. That was why he preferred the Khmer Rouge.

And Pol Pot, you like him? I asked.

Oh, he's a bogeyman. Parents use his name to frighten their children. If you just say his name, children will scream and run away. He's too strict, too cruel. I've never seen him, of course...

But he heads the K.R., and you like the K.R.

The police general finished his beer. His wife refilled the glass. —Soon the old man must die, he said. He, and Khieu Samphan, and Sihanouk, and Hun Sen—all the old generation. Then new people can come in to develop Cambodia.

Who would you say is stronger, the Reds or the Whites?

In this area, definitely the Reds.

Is there any other difference between the two?

Well, the Whites only care about money, money, money. The Reds follow the secret way.

From The Cambodia Daily:

GOV'T TAKES CONTESTED HILLS

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE: ARANYAPRATHET. Two strategic hills leading to a Khmer Rouge stronghold in the northwest fell Monday to government forces, Cambodian army sources said. Government forces captured Hill 25 and nearby Hill 36 from the rebels in a two-day operation but lost four tanks and suffered heavy casualties, a captain, who requested anonymity, told AFP.¹⁵

CONCERNING FRIENDSHIP, AND THE INTERVAL OF URINATION

In a classic illustration of how one does indeed rise to one's proper level of incompetence, the White officer to whom the police general introduced me at the border the following day admitted that he didn't know so much these days, although he was in border intelligence, because he'd been promoted, so he just rode around in a car now; he never went data-collecting in the jungle anymore. He'd joined the army at eighteen, which would have been during the post-K.R. Vietnamese occupation period. He was thirty-five now. His main task was to remind all his Thai counterparts, such as our police general, to check all the I.D.s of Cambodians coming across the border. If they had identification, then they were White; they were O.K. If they had no papers at all, then they were certainly Red.

What do you do when you catch a Red? I asked.

Here on the Thai side I have no power, he said. I try to get the Thai police to help me bring them back to Cambodia.

And then?

And then I try to teach them, he said. I say: Do you want to change your mind or not? If they say yes, then it's O.K. I enroll them in the White army and give them one star or even two stars to make them happy. If they say no, I have to kill them right away, because they're so dangerous. I cannot even bring them to prison.

How do you kill them?

By shooting.

In one month, how many are killed?

The White officer suddenly became abashed and uneasy. —Fifty per month surrender, he said. But actually we never kill anyone. Everyone must be afraid of death, you know. Everyone must surrender.

What's your opinion of the Khmer Rouge system?

No good. Always killing people, and then the citizens die.

He was very uneasy now, and busy to boot; he had to rush off because a battle had just broken out ten kilometers away. I asked the Thai police-general, who'd walked so tenderly finger-in-finger with his colleague, what he thought about him.

—Well, he said. I know his superior, so he must respect me. But I'll say this. Before, a Cambodian was your friend all day, and only changed his mind in the night time. Then they all started getting greedier, and a Cambodian was your friend for about an hour. Now a Cambodian is your friend for about as long as it takes him to piss.

Who kills more people, the Reds or the Whites?

He shrugged. —It's about the same. You know, sometimes the Whites come illegally into Thailand in the night time to do bad things to our citizens, and we have to kill them. On the other hand, the Reds kill the citizens, too. Just this morning at eight o'clock they shelled Poipet Market again, and somebody was killed; many were wounded; I don't know yet how many...

A RECRUITMENT STORY

I have to say that this police general was very good at his job. When I photographed Mr. Red, the K.R. "small soldier," it was too dangerous for him to bring his uniform across the border, so I bought him a new one in a shop in Aranyaprathet which the police general brought me to. There were many such shops. One owner said that the main buyers of K.R. equipment were crazy rock stars from Bangkok. The next step was to bring Mr. Red to a place where I could safely photograph him. Here again the police general proved invaluable, sitting beside the scared driver all the way to town, with the equally scared boy beside D. and me in the back; every time we came to a checkpoint the police general would simply roll down the window and shout: Pass! —I marveled at how easy it all was. In his loud and jocular voice he assured the driver that without him the driver, D. and I must infallibly go to jail, Mr. Red would be prosecuted, and the driver's truck would be confiscated forever. He then turned to Mr. Red and cried: I remember your face! Next time I'll catch you! —The boy tried to grin back. —I know everything about you now, said the police general. As soon as I saw your face, I even knew your shoe size!

By the end of the photo session (about which I am happy to report that the bribes were not much over twenty dollars, the fees likewise reasonable, the salaries almost so, the assessments not too burdensome; and about which I also want to say that Mr. Red thrilled with pleasure and pride when he put on his brand new Khmer Rouge uniform), Mr. Red and the police general were friends. Mr. Red (who now admitted to being no defector at all, but still a Khmer Rouge—an inactive alumnus, so to speak) had agreed to spy for him. The police general already had six border boys in his stable; Mr. Red would be the seventh. The police general was happy with his new intelligence source (and quite satisfied with the three thousand baht¹⁶ we later paid him); Mr. Red was happy with his present lump sum from D. and me and his expected future piecemeal earnings from the police general; D. and I were happy to get the photos out of the way and not be arrested; who says that journalism doesn't serve the world?

INTRODUCING MR. GOLD

I felt that D. and I were finally starting to get somewhere. Meeting Mr. Red had been considerably more satisfying than meeting Aum Sambath. The driver thought that we could do even better. He had a friend named Mr. Gold—well, let me put this another way, for I am not sure that Mr. Gold had any friends. Mr. Gold's name was not, of course, Mr. Gold, but the meaning was not so different, and gold was certainly one of his preoccupations. He was Khmer and had done a lot of work for Japanese journalists. One of D.'s friends had used him and said that he always got the goods, but finally dropped him because Mr. Gold was too greedy, too expensive. He reminded me of Mr. Capitol's Vietnamese brother-in-law, who was all business, and had been a soldier for the Viet Cong for a good seven or eight years. You could see this in the brother-in-law's face (maybe I do believe a little in moral yellowness after all). It was a dark, tight, blank, unfriendly face, half-concealed by dark glasses and an immense straw hat. It never smiled. It looked upon the world with indifference. When some device of avarice was conceived beneath the forehead's weathered skin, then whispers might come out of the mouth; the face might readily bend, in order to mouth greedy and sinister breathings in Mr. Capitol's ear, but the face itself expressed nothing, was nothing, had looked, I am sure, upon nothingness, because the soul within had seen and done terrible things. Here was my conception of Pol Pot. Mr. Capitol had said that this brother-in-law of his cared not whom he killed. He gave even his name grudgingly, in a monosyllabic growl. To him I was but a possible source of money. I had no doubt that he would sell D. and me to the police or the Whites or the Reds if that would be more lucrative than doing the straight and honest thing. He was to me not a person (for I was not a person to him), but an exemplar of *Homo bellicosus*, War Man, like the women D. knew who refused to share a banana with their starving children. He had swum in rivers of blood not initially of his own making; seeking to live, he'd drunk of them and drowned in them, and been reborn without empathy or gentleness or loyalty, except to his intimates, who perhaps shared his habits. This too was Mr. Gold, although the latter was handsomer. Mr. Gold preferred the Red side, because if you went to the Reds you could keep your power, but if you went to the Whites you must give everything up—like cutting off an arm and a leg, he said. We bought Mr. Gold expensive dinners every night and set him to work.

MR. GOLD TO THE RESCUE

And now I am proud to report that Mr. Gold's illicit excursions to the jungle on our behalf had finally paid off, for despite Pol Pot's rather stern prohibition he had found a Khmer Rouge "big general" who was willing to sing. This was no small accomplishment on his part. Nobody who was not a businessman met the K.R. any-

more, it seemed. The Japanese journalists were always trying. They threw their money around and generally managed to cross the minefields by one secret way or another until they got to Battambang. The Khmer Rouge finished a number of them off there. The police general had told me one story of a Japanese with a video camera worth one million baht. The Khmer Rouge shot him in the face and sold the camera for a hundred thousand, which means that the only one who got any kind of story out of it was me, and it's not even a very interesting story, only sad and disgusting like all the other stories about this particular war. So Mr. Gold promised us that on Sunday, if we were good and waited with at least half-bated breath, the K.R. general would actually come to our hotel (at first he'd proposed an extremely expensive hotel which we would rent for the day and the K.R. general would use for an hour, after which Mr. Gold could presumably derive joy from it for the remaining hours with either his wife or some other Cambodian lady of his choice, but I finally put my foot down), and so D. and I waited and waited, and on Tuesday he actually came. *Ab kbun*,¹¹⁷ Mr. Gold.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL X.¹¹⁸

He frowned, folded his arms, and glowered, refusing to answer when I asked how he was. I felt that he hated me. He crossed his ankles, put his head back against the wall, and gazed at the ceiling.

He spread his fingers like wings and folded them in against his breast. His black eyes sparkled strangely.

He said if we take picture of him, member see and must kill, said D.

When did you join the Khmer Rouge?

1975.

How old are you now?

Thirty-six.

He never looked at me except in side-flashes, and then quickly gazed away at the hall. Perhaps it was not hatred after all that infected him, but fear. I knew this much: without the money he would never have come. How much was he actually getting? Mr. Gold, who sat blandly translating from Khmer to Thai in his melodious voice, had required fifteen thousand baht¹¹⁹ for this hour (although yesterday he'd told us ten). He'd said that the Thai soldiers required five thousand, and this general ten. But when it came time to pay Mr. Gold at the end of the interview, he drove the general away first. He did not want him to see that fat envelope which D. placed into his hands. Mr. Gold was a thoroughly selfish and unpleasant person. The one thing I'll say for him is that he could get results which even the Thai police general couldn't. My assumption is that Mr. Gold took at least half the money for himself, then told the general and the Thai soldiers that the stingy no-good falang had underpaid. This way he could keep the money, and also impart a sufficiently nega-

tive image of me to make it difficult for D. and me to contact these people again without his paid mediation. Later that day he sent our driver to ask how much we were going to give him for his trouble, so we had to pay him another two thousand five hundred. I didn't want to do it, but D. said that if we got Mr. Gold angry then we'd never be able to meet Pol Pot, so I bit my lip and paid. That night the driver saw Mr. Gold and his wife at an expensive restaurant, blowing money. When the driver stopped to talk with him, Mr. Gold said: Why are you friends with that falang? He's not Thai or Khmer; he's no good. —Oh, I said to D. when he reported this to us. —Ask him what he replied. —He said to Mr. Gold, I not friend with stupid falang, only for working, for job, take money. Then Mr. Gold happy. Good, eh?

The Khmer Rouge general glared at the ceiling. He wore dark clothing, one item of which was a brand-new navy denim jacket with shiny buttons. That looked expensive, and so did his black pants. My sense of symbolism was pleased to see that *beneath the jacket he had on a red shirt. He was very slender and stern and resolute.*

What memory do you have of the Lon Nol time?

In that time he was too young. He was security of big person in K.R. At that time he was sixteen year.¹²⁰ At that time Americans support Lon Nol, but he think more Lon Nol soldier die than K.R.

Why did you join the Khmer Rouge?

Because at that time Khmer Rouge can come winner from Lon Nol already.

This was a clear answer, a reasonable answer, a fair answer. This Khmer Rouge was a careerist, not an ideologue, as one would have expected from his date of joining. But it made me sad, because that was how they all were, from the scared boys I'd met five years ago at T-3 prison to the "small soldier" a day or two before. I longed to meet somebody like Hermann Göring, who at the Nuremberg Trials argued with the prosecutor point by point, unashamed to be a Nazi. This general was not going to be Göring. He was going to be another General Keitel, another I-was-only-following-orders type.

When you joined, did you become a Communist?

Yes.

Are you a Communist now?

The mouth opened. I saw a flash of shiny teeth.

We are still in the jungle, the mouth said, so we are still Communist.

What does Communism mean to you?

Just fighting for something he want to do, fighting for some aim until success.

Anything else?

For his feeling, everyone in the world want to get good things, but for the small soldier, just doing, like you give me go to market, and I do, but I don't know what is the aim.

When he said that, I felt a little sorry for him. Unlike Göring and Keitel, he

was not on trial for his life here. I had promised not to make trouble for him, and I wouldn't. He could have blustered; he could have boasted; he could have said that he was proud of who and what he was. But even though he was a high-ranking general (a fact which was later independently confirmed for me by another source), he spoke like a "small soldier." In other words (I'd guessed it), he was just following orders. A moment later, I felt even more sorry for him, because there came a hailstorm of knocking on the door and he almost fainted. D led him into the bathroom and closed the door. It was only the maid, come to return our laundry. This general was truly in peril of his life, not from me, but from almost everyone else in Thailand.

Do you know who Karl Marx is? I asked.

He know about Marx-Lenin. He know their system.

Can you describe that system?

He don't know too much, but he know. Marx-Lenin system is very strong and strict. If they tell you do, then you must do, dead or alive.¹²¹ About the rule of Karl Marx they always make the tough rule. If they want you to go you have to go; if they tell you to stop you have to stop, tell you to turn right you have to turn right; you can't say no. If you say no they going to punish you.

And Mao, do you know about him?

China, said the general with a happy smile.

Yes, said the translators, he know.

Has he ever read the works of Mao?

Never. He never have time for reading. For his own idea, never agree with Communism, he added unexpectedly.

He touched his heart and began to speak very earnestly, gesturing with his fists. I was glad that he was not afraid of me anymore.

For himself, he is big general. He have the small soldiers in his control about three-four hundred. At that time, under Communist control Cambodia, have good life or bad life, ever stay together. And now same. Many people in his control, like sons and father.¹²² If he want to defect to White, his people must follow him. He want to help them, because even White government cannot do, cannot help with food and medicine, only him. But for now he must do the thing from the big boss.

Having said this, the general leaned back and folded his arms.

I asked him one of the questions which I wanted to ask Pol Pot: What's the best way to help poor people?

First, the man must be soldier, and must help the citizen, must know how the citizen feeling, happy or unhappy. And he must looking for the safety for the citizens. Protect the country for all the Cambodian people, to make them think that you are man of the country.¹²³ And everyone must respect in him.

And for the women?

First, for the pregnant and for abnormality and child without father-mother from the fighting, we must keep in touch with another country to help them, because the women so important. We dependent on the U.N. that have real nice heart to help with all things for the Khmer people.¹²⁴

Did you have a happy life in the Pol Pot time?

No, unhappy.

Why?

Because in Communist control.

What happened?

At that time, they made us adapt ourselves. The soldier need to take care for the border and the women and the child work in the farm to develop country, like a big group. In the Communist system, must work in team.

And what was your job?

First time, he work like a citizen, work in a farm. After that he work in army camp.

Why did you change your job?

From order he must do.

Which job was better?

He like both.

In the army camp, what did you do?

Fighting at the border, with Vietnamese. Every day shooting.

With whom?

Fighting with Vietnamese government and Thai.¹²⁵ At that time, he is security of big boss soldier. Every day he must follow.

Where was this?

Commune Sdao, in Battambang Province. Road Ten.

(This is a sort of pedigree. Sdao, which means "Big Tree," is part of an area severely repressed by the Sihanouk regime in 1967, which accordingly, as one book puts it, "started to produce increasing numbers of Khmer Rouge leaders and fighters... These became Pol Pot's 'base people,' activists who could be trusted, people who were untarnished by the corruptions of modernity, foreign influences, and capitalism: these were 'original Khmers.'"¹²⁶ In 1990 the Khmer Rouge bombarded the town, which was now under White control. The same book said: "In Sdao the only remains of the former district center at the close of 1991 were the district office, the hospital, and the market building. All bore the scars of the shelling ...")¹²⁷

On April seventeenth, 1975, when the Khmer Rouge won, where were you?

In Sdao.

How were you feeling?

Unhappy, because he have to leave from mother and father.

Why?

That time, society is changed. Kid from seven until sixteen years old is in one group, eighteen until thirty is another group. Had to live in big camp.

On April seventeenth, did someone tell you that the Khmer Rouge had won?

That day all of soldier he saw go to Phnom Penh without gun and no fighting. But no one tell him.¹²⁸

And you were unhappy then?

First time is very happy. He think Sihanouk is get winner. After that two months, feel unhappy because society change.

General X was not the only one who was fooled. Even Sihanouk himself, a decade after the Khmer Rouge had murdered five of his children, to say nothing of a not inconsiderable amount of his other citizens, could pen the incredible phrase: *our victory in Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975.*¹²⁹ Our victory! Well, yes, it was at least a victory over Sihanouk's hated usurper, Lon Nol...

How about Sihanouk, I asked, did you ever see him?

Yes. Ever shake hands with Sihanouk, ever say hello, in mountain name Marlai.¹³⁰

When did you first see a killed person, in the Lon Nol time or the Pol Pot time? Pol Pot time.

When was that?

1975, after Lon Nol finish.

What happened?

After finish fighting, and then have some order, if you are big general of Lon Nol, you must bring uniform to meet Sihanouk, and after that, general all get on truck, and they kill them.

Did you kill them?

No.

Who did it?

He didn't know who. Just see dead people.¹³¹

How many?

At Tra Bianka bridge in Sdao,¹³² about three or four hundred persons.¹³³

How were they killed?

Shooting.¹³⁴

Did you see things like that many more times?

Many times. Very often.

How were you feeling when you saw the dead generals?

Feeling sad.

Have you ever been to Phnom Penh?

Never.

You know, the first time I went to Phnom Penh I went to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and to the killing fields at Choeng Ek. And in those places they say that the Khmer Rouge killed more than a million people during the Pol Pot time. What do you think about that, true or false?

He never been, but most of people say yes, from Pol Pot killing. When did you first hear the name Pol Pot? I asked.

The man tensed, *gripping at his arms.*

1980, month ten, day thirteen, he said. That day is the day they don't want to have Communist system. After that he hear the name Pol Pot from the lieutenant of the army.¹³⁵

So even in the Pol Pot time you never heard that name? I exclaimed, experiencing a thrill of strangeness.

He never know Pol Pot then. Only Khieu Samphan. At that time it was the secret time. And some persons bigger know that Pol Pot is the head, but cannot speaking. He himself know only *Angkar*.

STATEMENT OF A WITNESS (FROM POL POT'S TRIAL IN ABSENTIA)

[The Khmer Rouge] advised us to continue our way to the South where Angkar (the government) was to welcome us. At first, as I did not understand exactly what the word "Angkar" meant, I wondered: "who is Angkar?," "where does he stay?," "how are we to find him?"...

[After our arrival there was a rally where] we were suggested not to think anymore of Phnom Penh for we were never to return there. Angkar had turned the city into a warehouse. On the first day of our arrival, everything seemed fine; we could enjoy individual freedom.

But gradually Angkar's face would appear in its true colour. In fact, we soon have to observe a whole host of prohibitions:

—Speak no language other than Khmer...—Girls and young women are not allowed to keep long hair. They should have it cut short (in the bob style of little Chinese girls)...—All clothing should be black...—At dusk go to bed and do not speak too much (spies were going on rounds trying to eavesdrop).

...One evening, after dinner, [my husband's friend] was taken away. Angkar, he was told, needed his services. Two weeks later ... it was the turn of twenty-four other people, among them was my husband, of course...[The village chief] told me: "Don't worry, he'll be back within two days. Angkar simply needs some information because your husband's friend has denounced him." Days, months, and years have passed but up till now I have not seen my husband again. Those who were taken away with him have not come back either.¹³⁶

"ONLY POLITICS"

And what did you think Angkar was—a person or an organization?

At that time, replied General X., if three persons keep in touch, any three persons, we can call ourselves Angkar.

And what did Angkar say about Sihanouk?

Angkar say Sihanouk is good and senior to them. They respect him like an elder brother.¹³⁷

What did Angkar say about the dead generals you saw on the bridge?

Angkar say nothing, because Angkar they do that themselves. I tell you already, if three persons keep in touch, we are Angkar. We say, that is bad person. We fix the problem, go to kill.

Did you ever kill people?

Never, he said, and I suspected that this was his first lie.

Do the K.R. still refer to themselves as Angkar?

After 1980 they close for everyone, cannot call Angkar. They stop Communist system. Right now they call Country of the Army.¹³⁸

Who announced it to you?

Son Sen and Ieng Sary, they know, and they said stop for Angkar anymore.

Were you sad?

After they closed the Communist system, he was happy and had some hope to change system for development, for the happy life.¹³⁹

And on that day, two years after the Khmer Rouge regime had been overthrown, you first heard of Pol Pot?

That time Pol Pot show off himself.

That day you saw Pol Pot?

For himself, he never saw. Keep only in touch with assistant of Pol Pot. Only the big one in the army know him.¹⁴⁰

And what did you think about Pol Pot then?

This one he stay in control, but still feeling happy about Pol Pot, but he didn't know the way to develop Cambodia.

(That was how D. and Mr. Gold translated what he said. But when my friend Chheng listened to the tape in California months later, her interpretation was far more sad and horrible. According to her, General X. had said: In that time we didn't know; if they want us to do bad we do bad; if they want us to do good we do good, because we wait for they give the order and we never have any idea at all.)

And do you think that Pol Pot was good or bad? I asked the man

Pol Pot is good.

Why is he good?

At the time that the Vietnamese come to the fighting with Cambodia, at that time Pol Pot always be with the citizen, near them in our country, and the soldier, he near them. In Lon Nol time we saw the big army drop the gun and run away from Vietnam, but right now the big army of Pol Pot never run, and they can go up and down from the mountain and stay in the forest to protect the people.¹⁴¹

In other words, I thought, General X. admired Pol Pot because he believed that Pol Pot protected him from something still worse than Pol Pot.

But they never actually saw Pol Pot, right?

He not yet stay all together, you know, but in secret, always stay, but in jungle with his secret soldiers.

Then how did you know that Pol Pot stayed if you never saw him?

He know, because he is security of big person, and big person is security of Pol Pot.¹⁴²

What is the name of the big person?

Ieng Sary.

(Ieng Sary was the vice prime minister of External Relations—and also, of course, a member of the Standing Committee of Angkar. A month or so after this interview with General X, he surrendered to the Whites. He is said to have invited a thousand intellectuals home to Cambodia in order to have them liquidated. The Vietnamese-installed regime in Phnom Penh customarily referred to the Khmer Rouge as “the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique.” General X. was a big general indeed.)

So you were his bodyguard?

Yes. Himself and his friend, he ever go ahead in jungle to clear the way for Ieng Sary. And sometimes Pol Pot follow behind on white elephant, but he never see Pol Pot. Ieng Sary and Pol Pot very close. Ieng Thirit is wife of Ieng Sary, but sister¹⁴³ of Ieng Sary is wife of Pol Pot.

Hm, I said. So you think it's true, that in Phnom Penh all those dead people they talk about were killed under the authority of Pol Pot?

Yes.

And you think the figure of a million or more is true?

For his idea, fifty percent from Pol Pot, ten percent from disease, thirty percent not yet true, and ten percent from Vietnamese coming.

So Pol Pot killed maybe half a million people?

Something like that.

But you think that Pol Pot is a nice person?

Yes.

Why?

Because not yet Pol Pot kill by himself, just the Angkar.

Pol Pot didn't know?

Difficult to control the Angkar. At that time, any head of village can kill the people! Pol Pot know, but only afterward, when already too late.

In your view, when is violence justified? When is it okay to kill people?

For himself, he want to kill the people if he do mistake like spy. For the big person, first he want to kill if make big mistake. For the small person, first he want to put him in prison and teach him. Then if small person does not become good, kill. If become good, then no problem.

Do you want to kill me, because I am an American, and Americans did the bad thing in Cambodia before?

At this question, General X. did a very surprising thing. He clasped his hands

and bowed in what Thais call a wai, a salutation and a remark of respect. —That mean he like you so much, said D., awed. For himself, she translated, he very happy to meet you. For fighting it is another choice, only politics.

Ah, I thought. That was it. That was the answer. “Only politics.” Indeed, that’s all it was. That was what Madame Black-Eyes had said, too. Surely that was what Pol Pot would say. That’s all it had been when they tricked the generals and shot them in cold blood, when they cut people’s livers out and ate them before their eyes, when they smashed women and children’s heads in by the truckload and kicked their squirming bodies into the mass graves.

And if I went to the jungle to see you, I asked, would you still be happy to meet me or would you kill me for being a spy?

If in his control you are welcome. But only in his control. Many other control area on the way. Excuse me, but not only Americans are forbidden to go there. Everyone is forbidden. For his system, always keep very very secret. He says, if you don’t believe in me, try for yourself. Go there. You’ll die.

“BECAUSE WE KILL EACH OTHER”

The general’s arms were folded again, his head wearily tilted. It had been an hour, and Mr. Gold gave me a long cool look, apprising me of the fact that I’d already received more than full value for my money; every time we met him he was quick to mention that the Japanese always paid him a hundred thousand baht per session; they’d bought him a new car; they’d done all kinds of things... I just thought to myself: Then why are you still living in that mosquito-ridden hovel of yours? (D. had a Japanese friend who was a television journalist. He’d stopped using Mr. Gold because even though Mr. Gold always got the goods, he was too expensive.)

What is the Khmer Rouge aim now? I asked.

Now we don’t need fighting. We want to keep in touch with Whites to join the government.

If you succeed in that, how can you keep Angkar from coming back?

For his idea, he guarantee one hundred percent, if K.R. keep in touch with Whites, never have Angkar anymore. He himself want finish K.R., but cannot abandon small soldiers. But Sihanouk must be the king—only him.

Not Pol Pot?

He think Pol Pot never come again.

But Pol Pot is such a nice person, you said. Don’t you want Pol Pot?

He doesn’t want Pol Pot come back.

If D. and I are able to meet Pol Pot, do you have any message for him?

Tell him please stop the war, because we kill each other, Cambodia against Cambodia.

I could hardly fault that observation. The next day I was at the border again with D. and the police general. Leaving behind me the spies and the lolling shop-

ladies in their folding chairs, I looked across the frontier to Poipet, and then I looked across the street at the Thai immigration checkpoint, where the usual gaggle of submissive Thai journalists sat waiting to be told the news (like me, they were not allowed to cross the border; D. said that while I'd been in Phnom Penh she'd called some journalist friends of hers together for lunch and asked them if they had any leads on Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge; they told her that they could never even think of writing a story like that, because if they did they'd lose their jobs at the very least, and probably much, much worse); and just then I heard the dull sound of a big gun ten kilometers away; the police general said that that was White artillery; and I heard another shot and then another.

EPILOGUE

On 18 June 1997, the Cambodian army's deputy chief of staff announced that Pol Pot had surrendered. Later the Khmer Rouge held a show trial instead and condemned him to life imprisonment. Then he died. It might be true.

THE LAST GENERATION

(1996)

White chicks will kill a black chick every time. But I do hope it isn't as simple as that.

JOHN STEINBECK (1951)¹

This is the story of how, as they say, violence begets violence, and how a number of Cambodian immigrants in Long Beach, who obviously never saw blacks and Latinos in Cambodia, now hate and fear them, how that hatred makes some of their children do things which call the law down upon them, and accordingly makes them hate the law, too—I grant you that the law is corrupt enough in Cambodia that hating it in American constitutes no stretch—in short, this is the story of how for logical and almost excusable reasons people can become racists. I will not present the black and brown sides of this story, because I don't have the space, and in fact it is not necessary to do so. One could equally well have written an account of Latino gangs, or black gangs, and ignored the Cambodians' point of view; because race, while the central vehicle of the hatred described in this story, remains indissolubly irrelevant in and of itself: When people get hurt, or hurt others, we don't need to know what color they are to know that they are wronged or doing wrong.

Anyone who cannot understand this, or who cannot sympathize a little with the racists in this story, is probably himself a racist or a dogmatist.²

In April 1996, the gang truce brokered at Pastor Joe Esposito's church on Anaheim Street had endured for over a year. My friend Soeun³ rarely heard shooting in the night time anymore. (The other thing I need to tell you is that this story about gangs is mostly about Soeun, whose second wedding photograph shows her in a lavender dress and white gloves, beautiful Soeun with the rough hands of a working woman; she supports her parents and her children doing piecework sewing at home, Soeun who taught me more about Cambodian gangs than anyone else, in part because she steered me away from them as much as she could. Like Soeun, you'll hear no shooting in this story. You'll see no guns. You'll only hear a few nasty, bitter stories, see a boy's scars, hear the impact of a casually thrown rock. This is true life with its sickening little meannesses. Once when we were driving around we saw two gangsters slouching in front of a laundromat. Soeun was terrified and pretended not to hear my request to stop so that I could talk to them; once we were on the freeway, I finally persuaded her to turn around, a complex process which occupied ten minutes, by which time the gangbangers were already gone. We drove around the block, and then saw them again, but by that time Soeun had already gotten on the freeway. She didn't want to meet them; she was afraid; she had already suffered. This is the story of Soeun, and of her sons, of her brother and his lost children.) It almost seemed that I'd find nothing on the subject of gangs to write about as, walking down Anaheim, I saw the way that Angkor Auto Repair and Body Shop, with its red Khmer lettering beneath, abutted Preah Vihear Video, then Kathy's Bakery, then La Nayarita Bakery—why not call this interracial marriage? On Cherry Street it was a sunny, windy day of little Asian kids running down the sidewalk, Asian ladies watering their small, California-style lawns with garden hoses, an Asian grandmother or two squatting in the garden dirt, weeding, just as I have seen them do in the rice paddies of Cambodia; and Hispanic ladies weeded next door. "Peace in our time," just as Neville Chamberlain had boasted! And high time, too—three dozen people or more had been killed in the gang war.⁴ The number of violent "incidents," of course, was considerably higher.⁵ The press clippings I read in my hotel room dwelled on a hunting party in the spring of 1994, when an Asian gang, probably Cambodian, shot six Latinos in a parked car, three of whom died. Two days later, a couple of Asian gang members got whacked. One Cambodian told me that the East Side Longos had started it back in the mid-1980s; the Longos, who were Latino, had their own there-goes-the-neighborhood version.

Yes, it had been mainly an Asian-Latino war. This doubtless explains why most of the Cambodian gang members I talked to, dragging their sad and resentful histories around inside their honor-ridden hearts, still hated and were hated by Hispanics the most. Cambodians who were not in gangs often awarded blacks first place on the scale of antipathy. Typical was one of the Cambodian pharmacists on

Anaheim, not far from Pailin Jewelry's locked door with its buzzer and a grating inside and another grating within that; the young pharmacist told me while I was very slowly buying sore throat lozenges that of course it wasn't as good here as Cambodia, or even Washington state where he'd gone to school; life was too busy now, and too unsafe. Once three black boys had stepped on his feet and put guns to his head. He couldn't open the register, so he had to give them his wallet. That had happened in East L.A., but in his opinion Little Phnom Penh was a pretty bad neighborhood, too. Sometimes at opening time right here on Anaheim (so he'd heard; it had never happened to him), a black boy would come in and ask you to give him a fifty-cent item for twenty-five cents, and if you said you couldn't do that, there he'd be, standing on your feet, with a gun to your head. He didn't know any Cambodian gang members well, he said, but he understood why they might do the things they did. (His fear was likely exaggerated. Up at the police station, chunky, professorial and fair-haired Detective Sørensen, behind whose head a map of Long Beach bore blue dots to mark last year's shootings, had told me: Very very few people kill people in robberies.) I asked the clerk about Latinos; he said that none had bothered him personally.

This is how we human beings conceive our opinions, by and large: Some category of entities affects us, and we apply our resulting experience when judging other entities that we believe to be in that category. If we are competent mathematicians, and the categories are mathematical ones, then we just might get away with it. Otherwise, there's a good chance that we'll form the wrong categories. Thus, a man who has been robbed by black men could justifiably hate and distrust robbers afterwards, but unfortunately he might choose simply to hate and distrust black men. The problem is that the victim does not know any infallible way to *a priori* identify members of the category called robbers; it would be inconvenient to get scared every time he saw groups of men, or tall men, so he chooses to be suspicious of black men, the approach of them now as lurid and as sickening to him as headlight-flashes through the crack of a whiskey-bar door.⁶ There is, I think, a strong component of subconscious association in such reification. When my two friends died violently in Bosnia, their deaths were accompanied by loud sharp explosions. For months afterward, the noise of a slammed door or a backfiring engine made my heart race with fear. My subconscious was trying to protect me, and because it did not really understand what had happened it did the best it could, which was to make me afraid of loud noises. I am convinced that racial prejudice is often formed by a similar mechanism.⁷ Physical violence may not be necessary in its manufacture.

One high noon at Rec Park, just across Anaheim from the two-story Asian mall with its almost generic southern California look of pale arches and curvy orange roof-tiles, a sweet old black grandmother who was waiting for four-year-old Virginia's preschool to open, said: I've lived around here for seventy-one years, and nobody's ever bothered me. People can make a big deal out of everything. You just

gotta learn where those areas are and stay out. You don't bother them and they don't bother you. It's a nice area. —The preschool's doors opened just as a siren sobbed and an ambulance slavered by—nobody looked up, for that happened every day, as it does in any big city in America—and the grandmother called Virginia away from the swing, led her into the classroom, came out and waved goodbye to me. It was a friendly park. Black kids and white kids and Asian kids were all playing together. —Three teenaged black girls were leaning on the fence. Their pretty twists of braid sparkled in the sun. They'd just dropped off their own children at the preschool by the library. They chatted for a while, and then split up. One called: Tell your Mama I said hi—love 'er!—Then a Cambodian family came and sat on the grass, the woman cross-legged with her feet tucked under her haunches as in Cambodia. The father kicked a ball around with the little boy. Soon the mother was helping. They had a basketball and a beach ball, and both were going at once. They were laughing and clapping and calling out happily to one another as one ball or the other flew in the sun... The beach ball rolled through the sand, its strange half-dark, half-light shadows rolling beneath it. It reached the gate where another black mother said to her kid: Whose ball is this? Motherfuck! It's yours now. —And she scooped it up and handed it to her child. They began to walk away. The Cambodian mother suddenly saw what was happening and rushed to the fence, gazing after the thieves in silent helplessness. The black woman turned, regarded that anxious face, scowled, and finally hurled the ball back over the fence. Nothing had been said. Gripping her child's hand, the black woman passed out of sight.

“WE'RE ALL CRIPS DOWN HERE”

The funny—well, the predictable thing—was that while the Cambodians so often believed that blacks and Hispanics had organized against them, at least some of their enemies believed the same thing about them. As I stood leaning against a lamppost, a black man approached me for money. —I just want a job, he said. I want to put in a day's work. I don't mind telling you I'm out on parole. See, those guys on the other side of the street, those Asians, I don't blame 'em. They stick together. They help their own kind. You don't ever see an Asian guy on the street bummin' a cigarette. But we blacks just can't get it together. Every time we try to get hand in hand, somebody gets angry or something winds up missing.

Why is that? I said.

I don't know.

I wondered if he truly believed that or if he were saying it in hopes of softening me up, whether his calculation might be that as a white man I'd like him more for running down his own race. Either way, it was no skin off my nose. But I found myself interested in his implication, which was that an Asian fraternity had formed itself in distinction to him, and that it would never open to him. I conceded some

truth in that, being myself an outsider, as I'd been upon the wobbling stairs which overlooked the apartment courtyard where Soeun had brought me to see some plump old Khmer ladies she knew who were dressed in yellow; one was wearing a golden Buddha around her neck; when Soeun asked them to tell us about the gangs they began to yell very angrily, staring at me and my backpack. —Cannot talk about that, Soeun translated. —I think the old dame was afraid. (Soeun was afraid, too, of course.) Yes, there was truth in the black man's charge of secrecy and exclusivity, and it made me sad.

But all that was natural. Of course Asians had shut me out. Many were the times that blacks had shut me out, too—and, for that matter, so had my own race. That was human, too, to give preference to similar minds and bodies.

Well, I can give you a buck, I said to the black man.

I don't want a buck. I want a job. I told you I'm on parole. I want to work. How about giving me a job? What's your job?

I'm a journalist.

Oh, is that a tape recorder going there on your belt?

No, that's my camera. I don't sneak, at least not most of the time.

So what are you doing?

A story on Cambodian gangs.

Well, there aren't any gangs around here. That's bullshit. We're just friends that hang together. We walk home from school together, blacks, whites, Asians, everybody, and the police just come along and bust us. Look, I've hung with the — Street Boyz. You know what that is?

Crips.

Crips, Crips! We're all Crips down here. Anyway, we're just some folks who won't take no shit, that's all. Hey, if I was in the wrong neighborhood some drunk-en white guy'd beat me up. Why should I stand for that?

And if I walked through your neighborhood at night, what would happen to me?

Nothing, he insisted.

The previous rusty gunmetal evening of drizzle and grey sidewalks, grey sky, it had not yet been as dark as the central voids in the tires on the auto shop racks, but the streetlight already melted like yellow pavement upon the pavement and sidewalk squares. On Seventeenth and Alamitos I found myself in black territory and saw a huge, handsome black boy leaning against a wall as a black girl paced beside him.

Can I ask you a question? I said to him.

Oh, shit, I don't have no fucking time for the fucking police, the girl shouted.

But the boy's face bore an expression of enchanted amusement. It was dark and rainy, and I was all alone with these two, and he knew it. I'll never forget the whiteness of his teeth as he smiled. His face, body and stance were so perfect, so stylishly regal and agile and powerful in a way that I could never be, that although I perspired with dread I longed for him to be my friend. He raised his hand to cut the

girl off—just an upflick sufficient for the purpose; and the girl shut up. He was the king; I was the worm; why not let the worm wriggle for the moment?

Let's hear what he has to say, he grinned to the girl.

I'm a reporter, I said. I wanted to learn about gangs.

See, I tole you he was police! the girl shouted. Listen, motherfucker, you gonna jack me up?

What's that mean? I said, making my eyes big and stupid.

You gonna send the other police my way, motherfucker? I'm tellin' you right now I'm on parole violation, an' whatcha gonna do about it? If you jack me up an' try to run away, I can run a lot faster than you can, motherfucker.

I smiled and showed them my press card.

I know he's police, chuckled the king to his concubine. Let's hear him out.

I want a dollar! the woman shouted, advancing so close that I felt her breath on my eyeballs. —*Break bread!*

And gimme five dollars, said the king.

It was at that moment that I felt threatened. The king, I felt, wouldn't hurt me as long as I treated him with respect. If he actually told me anything, I was perfectly willing to pay him. This was as legible to me as the billboard on First and Cherry that assured the world that HIGH VISIBILITY DETERS THIEVES. But the woman was trying to frighten me, and the fact that she was was what scared me. People like that, whose objective is but crude domination, cannot be humored very far because every acquiescence brings you closer to the end, which is their boot-sole upon your face; while refusing to be exploited and humiliated by them may for its part be construed as a challenge, provoking the snarling, killing lunge. She was treating me this way, I felt, because she knew that I was not among my own kind; she knew this because my skin was not the same color as hers.

I'll give you five dollars for information, I said. I just want to know how the black gangs, the Latino gangs and the Asian gangs get along.

We get along fine, the king grinned.

Why'ch'nt ya go an' ask them? —This from the woman. —They're right that way. Shit, get out of my face, whitey!

What do you want to talk to me like that for? I said. I guess I will go talk to them.

I'm proud that I didn't pay that pair a dime. They let me go. Behind me, the king kept laughing. I had an urge to look over my shoulder at the woman, from whose pocket I'd seen a knife-handle sticking, but I knew that this would be construed (correctly) as an expression of fear, which would render me more vulnerable to her assault. So I slowed my steps, apprehensive, and angry for having to be apprehensive when I had done nothing wrong.

I told this story to the black man who was panhandling me, the man who had claimed that nothing would happen to me if I strolled through "his" neighborhood at night—and of course he'd been proved right; nothing had happened. I waited for

a comment. —Well, he allowed, it depends on what you say, and on your tone of voice. They can tell if there's strength in your voice or not.

Pastor Joe Esposito at the Cambodian Baptist Church where the gang peace had been negotiated told me more or less the same thing—and here I want to say that I liked and respected Pastor Joe. Thin, bespectacled, fast-moving, an activist preacher who ran a tight ship, and I believe did a lot of good (for the parents of Cambodian gangbangers whose lives he'd changed had told me so),⁸ he explained: You have to love 'em unconditionally, and give them some guidance, some new purpose in life. They can't even go to the parks without getting shot.

That was the heart of it, I thought. I wanted to know some practical but decent, dignified way that Cambodian kids could go to any public place they pleased and not collect lead. I looked Pastor Joe in the eye and asked him: What's the best way for them to protect themselves if they don't go into the gangs?

I had a gang member, he's in prison now, Pastor Joe replied. He had some of his guys jumped. He said if you don't dress like that, you don't get jumped. We just say be careful where you're going. That's why we started a private school.

This answer I found no more satisfactory than the panhandler's, no better than that of the black grandmother who'd insisted: You just gotta learn where those areas are and stay out. —Why should I have to worry about where I was walking or whether there was strength in my voice or not? Why should my kids have to go to private school? Why should the tone of my voice get me shot? Why should wearing a red or blue bandana, or walking down a certain street at a certain time, give my assassin probable cause? These guidelines seemed practical, but that didn't make them right. No one seemed to have any proposal for establishing and enforcing a standard of decent behavior for the aggressors. I didn't, either. At night, many many sirens wept outside my hotel room, so I put my earplugs in. Once I went down the stucco alley of hotel bungalows to Cherry Street with its flickering roaring cars; and a man the color of the night, hooded in a night-colored sweatshirt, came rushing toward me and did not answer my greeting. He didn't hurt me; he was just a pimp come to collect his latest fresh money. But I decided then and there that since I was a stranger I'd better not walk around late at night without a friend; people had already warned me about that. It was all about hunkering and bunkering down, being careful, becoming street smart, and of course that was how it always had been and would be on this earth, but I didn't like it. And what the PTA lady behind and within Poly High's dingy beige escarpments said was what really made my heart sink like those weedy alleys in Little Phnom Penh whose pavement sagged in the middle, showing lots of sky. After Soeun and I had been signed in to Poly, I.D.'d, escorted, and predictably refused access at the principal's office, the PTA lady followed us out because she'd heard Soeun whisper to me that we ought to just sneak around to meet the shaveskulled Cambodian gangs at the gym, and of course we couldn't be allowed to do that. The perimeter was gloomy fences and walls. —I

think this is so sad, I said to her. —I don't, said the PTA lady. I don't even notice it.

A FATHER'S TALE

Pastor Joe had opined that the most dangerous place for a Cambodian to go was Fourteenth and Fifteenth between Walnut and Gardenia. That was right where Soeun lived.

Soeun unlocked the gate, led me up stairs parallel to an abandoned, smashed-windowed building, unlocked the apartment door, and brought me into the dim blueness of carpet and television flanked by the wall of family portraits. On the sofa her aged parents sat quietly beside her brother, who was visiting for the Cambodian New Year's holiday. Soeun herself sat down upon the floor with her legs tucked politely behind and beneath her, for in southeast Asia it is considered impolite to point one's feet at anyone, for it is our feet above other parts of us which touch dirt. In Cambodia I remember women sitting on the mounds of green net like seaweed, slowly, carefully folding them up, while the motor-canoes of their husbands, sons and brothers transected and disturbed the triangular orange reflections of fishing boats in the green water; and always their feet were tidied away like Soeun's.

Soeun's brother did not sit that way anymore. He worked in American offices. He said: I has a problem. I cannot see my kid anymore. I cannot control my own kid anymore. I want to discipline my kid and they say I'm not supposed to hit the kid, so they put me in the jail. So I know that in America each family, they give up control. The kids can call the cop. And you know, the cop cannot control them, either. I spend a lot of money for my kids' clothes, but my kids want their clothes to be baggy like gangsters.

What did you do?

I slap my kid across the face. In Cambodia that's normal. Kids don't obey their parents, they must get punished. And you know, in Cambodia we have no problem with these gangs! Kids obey their parents! If the law give some power for the parent, then the kid be good. Just make them hurt, make them scared of you—better than some gang kill the kid!

Soeun, sitting beside us, nodded at his words and said: When the parent gives some advice to be good, they say the parent hate them, but they don't understand that if they don't listen, they end up just hang out on the streets, stole something and shoot.

Her brother passed a hand across his wide face. —The cop say I cannot see my son right now, because he's in the jail for gangster, in juvenile hall.

What did he do?

I don't know. Hang around in the street with the gang. Friends are more important than family. That is what the gang kids think right now. I ask the cop: What can you do about this? (He was shouting.) The cop said, cannot do nothing until

shoot the people, do something bad. So I say, fine, okay, give up.

STATEMENT OF DETECTIVE NORM SØRENSEN,
GANG VIOLENCE SUPPRESSION

Would you agree that Cambodians don't believe much in the police?

Yeah, that's quite true. They're inexperienced at being able to understand our law. —He laughed. —I can't understand it myself.

A FATHER'S TALE (CONTINUED)

Soeun's brother sat there for awhile with a sad and bitter face, then went on quietly: I just want my kid to finish school, be good. I love my kid more than anything. You know, when each kid was born, even when I had not enough money I would go to the store every day, only look for something to buy for my kid, make my kid happy. How can I kill my kid? I myself never do something bad. I love my parents; I still live with my parents...

So you have three children?

The youngest one I send far away to Salt Lake City, to get away from the gangster. And the next one, already fifteen, she get pregnant already two months.

Is the father a gangster?

Yeah.

Will she marry him?

I don't know, because both are too young.

And your oldest?

I don't know what gang he join. I just forgot about it. He always run away from home, a couple days at a time. Cannot do nothing! His friends, they shoot one old lady, and my kids hang around with them. I just want to get them away. At that time my ex call me: My son have the baggy pants, want to go out right now. —He not scared of my wife. I left work and went over there. He tried to fight back to me. I tore his baggy clothes, and then he tried to hit me, so I slapped his face. He called his friends and he called the cops. Then they came to work and then handcuffed me. And they put me in the jail. They put me through the place real cold, you know.

Did you have any problem at work?

No. They were sorry for me. But I'm afraid to see my own kid, because if I do, I call to jail again.

ANOTHER ENCOMIUM FOR FEAR

The way that American politicians pretended to think, people would be motivated by their own interests, and by their socialized yearnings toward social good, to do good and be good. The way that the police thought, and the gangs thought, and Soeun thought, people—some of them, at least—needed to be motivated by fear. Hence the punchline of her story about the black thief. She had driven me up to a pay phone in a parking lot so that I could call Detective Sørensen, and as I got out, a perfectly nice black man approached me to collect my signature on some petition or other. Soeun rolled up her windows and power-locked all four doors, behind which she sat pale and expressionless, so that the black man in good-humored exasperation cried: Lady, it's not *that* bad out here! and tried to get her to read his petition but she just gazed at him through the window-glass with tenacious caution, the motor running, waiting to manually unlock my door for me when I approached. The black man just shook his head. I felt slightly sorry and embarrassed for him, but reminded myself that my job was not to tell Soeun how to behave before I understood the reasons for her behavior. Two days later she did give me reasons. We were talking about something else when a tall black man strode by, and she froze. When I gazed into her face, she said: One time I was coming home from work late in the night time, and when I get out from the car these two blacks, big tall one, threw me down on the street and take my purse.

Were you badly hurt?

Yeah, pretty bad. I had to go to the hospital. Just for one night, though.

I'm sorry they did that to you, Soeun.

I hate blacks, and that's why. Sometimes they try to get me. One time I was in the car waiting for my sister with the window rolled down and this black man asked me what time it was. When I bent my head to look at my watch, he grabbed my necklace from my neck. I tried to fight, but he hurt me.

Her angry pain was as hot and wide as Anaheim Street. I kept silent, waiting to hear more. After awhile, she confided a neighborhood story to me: One time this Cambodian gangster's mother got robbed by a black. She saw who it was. She was screaming, but nobody helped her. When she told her son, he chased that black. (Here Soeun began to brighten.) The first day he got away, but the next day he caught him (said Soeun with sidewise gleeful glances). He got his mother's purse back. He put that black guy in the garage and started to punish him, just punching him all afternoon till he looked like a balloon. Then he put him in the car. He tied his hands and feet and threw him in the ocean.

Did he die?

No. Gangster just taught him a lesson. And now (she concluded with pride) that black guy's afraid of Cambodians.

Had there been any other way to modify that thief's behavior? I wanted to

believe that there was, but couldn't think of any. The law would agree with me, for it sends its agents out upon the streets to uncover and punish transgressors. This was Soeun's solution as it was her brother's. The very first day I met her, Soeun had said: For awhile I was having trouble with my son. He kept talking about needing protection. I told my son I'd spank him if he joined a gang, even if he was in high school, and if he called the cops on me I'd wait until I got out of jail and then cut him into two pieces, throw him into the trash can. I told him I wouldn't care if I went back to jail after that.

What did he say then?

Nothing, she chuckled. He was scared!

A MOTHER'S TALE

The woman who'd once been in the Cambodian police in Battambang had long black shiny hair, curled and massy and glinting like obsidian, a lava-flow of black hair. The Khmer Rouge had murdered almost every member of her family. Long Beach was definitely better. (Soeun's brother agreed with that. Unlike Soeun, he did not want to return to Cambodia; it was too dangerous with all the mines and the fighting. I agreed with him, too. I remembered seeing on those glass shelves the skulls of baby girls, then the skulls of adolescent girls, then the skulls of mature women, then the skulls of old women, and then it started all over again for males, all those skulls seeming to scream because without jawbones to limit them their mouth-gapes were infinite, and the narrow inverted hearts of their nostrils were spiderwebbed with darkness; the killers were still in the jungles of Cambodia, and I did not blame people for preferring to move to the USA and live with gangs. Soeun of course just thought that she could keep herself and her family out of trouble no matter where she was, if she but withdrew into suspicious watchfulness.) The woman who'd been in the Cambodian police worked a night job, slept for four hours, got up to drive her son and daughter to school, slept again, cleaned her house, picked up her son, drove down Cherry Street down past the hooks and squiggles of Khmer-language signs, and went to work. In Thailand I'd once seen a Cambodian fisher-boy swabbing the decks with filthy river water. Later he dropped his bucket into the tub and drank out of it. But this woman had cartons of milk and juice in the refrigerator. She was tired but she was almost making it. Her husband had left her for his mistress. —I'm thinking my neighborhood good neighborhood, she said. Signal Hill is no crime. Because quiet. Anaheim between P.C.H., Walnut, no good. Very much about kid bad.

I pick up my kid every day, she went on. I tell him I love him so much. I say, please you don't get friend with Crips.⁹ He say, Mom, don't worry. I love you, too.

Many bad kid, she said then. My kid come home from school, bad kid always hitting him, so my kid get so sad, go to Crips.

STATEMENT OF DETECTIVE SØRENSEN (CONTINUED)

Do you think that Asian gangs do provide protection for their members?

Oh, yeah. There's no doubt about it.

"I JUST HANG OUT"

A few doors down from Soeun's house, an old Khmer woman in yellow was leaning on a fence. Soeun whispered that the crone was not a good person, and, precisely on account of that fact, possessed good experience. The crone led us half a block farther to an open gate and a passageway which gave onto a courtyard whose perimeter was apartment tiers not unlike those I'd seen in Phnom Penh: shoddy, smelly towers which at that mid-afternoon hour had begun to conquer the courtyard's sunlight with their greasy shade. (Soeun said that she'd never been there before because she was a lady and ladies weren't supposed to know about those things. She preferred to stay at home with her family. Once I asked her who her best friend was, and she said: When you get along with your best friend too much, you can't get along with your family. So better not to have a best friend, just friend-friend-friend, like that. Sometimes friends ask me if I want to go somewhere, and I always tell them no. If they drop by I don't know what to do. I just tell them I don't want to go anywhere.) Little girls in flower-print dresses passed through on their fathers' arms; a tray of cucumbers dried peaceably; and then looking around I spied the loitering boys.

Try this one, Soeun said, pointing.

You want to take a walk with us? I asked the indicated one.

My father said I can't go nowhere.

Are there any gang members around here?

They all moved away, he replied.

Oh, when was that?

Last year.

Last year, huh? And how was it for you when they were there?

Always shooting. We couldn't play.

What did they look like?

Baggy clothes.

What were their colors?

Maybe grey. I don't know.

(Grey would have been the colors of the Asian Boyz.)

So where were they shooting from?

The back.

I don't see any bulletholes, I said.

This one has more experience, said Soeun quietly, indicating an older boy.

So where are the gangs? I said to him.

They moved out.

Oh. When was that?

Two months ago.

Where did they go?

Out of state.

What were they like to you?

Very friendly.

They were? Then I would really like to meet them. But I guess they're out of state, huh?

Most of them are in jail.

Well, can I go there?

Only relatives can visit them.

How about if I write them a letter? I said. Maybe they might drop by from out of state; you never know.

Okay, he said.

I scribbled out a polite request for assistance, got back my English-Khmer dictionary, which the guy had tried to palm, and invited myself back the next day. — When's a good time to come?

All day, he said. I just hang out.

He was a gangster, of course, and I suspect so were the other lounging boys in that courtyard so grey, black-spotted and shot through with cracks like marble veins with rickety concrete stairs. A dragon-embroidered rug hung on one balcony. Kids were running, boys swaying toughly in doorways, stabbing the air with cigarettes. Boys gazed down upon me from the balcony, leaning their heads backwards or sitting on the railings themselves, balancing, constantly shifting their skinny agile legs, or sitting on the balconies reaching long brown arms up against the railings. A man with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth whispered something.

You want to talk to me? I asked the boy the next day.

No, I really don't want to talk to you.

Oh, in that case I'll stay, I said, leaning up against the wall, and then the upstairs boys retreated into their holes, certain that I must be the police.

He was looking at me, so I said: Are you Asian Boyz or TRG?¹⁰

He scowled; he wouldn't answer; so I said: Is it really worth it? Don't you get sad and bored, doing this stuff?

Dangerous to talk to him like that! said Soeun, shocked, and she led me away...

“WE GOTTA BEAT 'EM DOWN”

The apartment was one of a semicircular block of weary concrete horrors at a cul-de-sac on a street where Signal Hill ended. The old saw that my Marxist organizer taught me when I was a door-to-door canvasser continued to hold up: namely, that

rich people live on the hills and poor people live literally below them. Hence the mere name Signal Hill was a signifier of some affluence, and when I was granted the opportunity to see the apartment halfway up of that once hardworking Cambodian mother whose husband had divorced her for a younger mistress, I found a terraced palace of lower-middle-classdom, with bright red bougainvillea outside and deep dark carpet inside, the rooms well cared for despite a faint aroma of mildew. The apartment in the cul-de-sac, however, lay at the absolute bottom of Signal Hill. It abutted a concrete wall perhaps eight or nine feet high. Beyond this, I was told, lay Long Beach proper, but all I could see of it was a cloudy afternoon above the wall and all the ugly wires.

Soeun and I were standing outside one of the doors of this apartment when a car pulled up. The mother, owl-faced and tired, had just come back from picking up her two sons at school. Like so many of the Cambodians I met in Long Beach, she did not trust the school buses. As soon as she opened the door, the boys darted upstairs. In the USA this behavior is almost normal. In Cambodia, of course, they would have stood at their mother's side to welcome us, seated themselves with us, not spoken until spoken to, and, bored or not, waited until they'd been excused. I am not sure which of these protocols is better than the other, but it is obvious which one most Cambodian adults prefer. The whole place smelled exactly like a slop bucket which it had once been my duty to feed pigs from: a sour, almost butter-milky odor of food going rancid, but not yet stinking as in a garbage can. I'd smelled worse in Cambodia, but I'd smelled better in Long Beach.

Why doesn't the mother keep this place clean? I asked Soeun. Does she have to work?

No, she stays at home all day, but getting tired, because her kids have so many friends going in and out.

Upstairs, the two boys lay listlessly on their unmade beds in a little room with nothing on the walls. One of them had lit a stick of incense, possibly to cover up some drug smell. Rolling wearily onto his side, he thrust the stick upright into a wad of crumpled papers in the trash can. A moment later, all the papers had caught fire. Slowly he beat the flames out.

It is only fair to say that in Cambodia I have seen a lot of listless people, too, because it is very hot over there, but in Cambodia at least they smile sometimes (although of course in Cambodia many of them have stepped on land mines and crutch themselves around on one leg...).

One of the brothers was in tenth grade and one was in eighth grade.

How many kids in your high school are in gangs? I said to the tenth-grader.

Over half.

And in junior high?

Just wannabes, said the eighth grader. His friendliness, his liveliness, his very life was boarded up like the Hep Lee Market on Anaheim and Gaviota. (Most of par-

ents they don't know how to speak English, Soeun said to me later. Like when the kid come home, they try to help with the homework, but they don't understand, so they say, just do what you want to do. Then the kid don't care so much.)

What do the gangs do in school?

Nothing. Hardly nothing.

And outside of school?

Fights and chasing with the Mexicans or the blacks. Depends on which school. Wilson has a lot of Longos.

My son got hit by a Mexican in Wilson, Soeun put in.

Why?

I don't know, she said. Only Mexicans in Longo gang. I guess they hate Cambodians for some reason.

Just then I noticed that the eighth grader's arm was hideously scarred with multitudes of grey boil-like markings which reminded me of the mementoes which the Khmer Rouge had left on the back of a woman in Phnom Penh whom I loved.

Who did that to you? I asked.

Mexicans.

How many?

Two or three.

What happened?

Walkin', he said in his flat voice. Walkin' home from the afternoon classes. They had screwdrivers.

What did they look like?

They were taggers.¹¹ I didn't know them. They didn't know me.

The eighth grader also possessed a thick semicircular trophy in his arm, as if somebody had bitten into his flesh.

And that other scar?

I did that with a cigarette lighter.

You must have been feeling sad, I said.

He shrugged. —Just to see what it feels like.

If I wanted to join a gang, would they take me?

I dunno.

Whom would they take?

Anyone.

(That was true of the Khmer Rouge, too. I'd met ten-year-old K.R. soldiers. But this democratic inclusivity would seem to have less to do with Cambodian character than with American gangsterism as such, since there are young black, Latino and white kids in gangs as well.)

Which gangs are at the high school?

TRG, Asian Boyz, CBG.

So if I wanted to join one of them, how would I decide which was the best?

Just check to see how bad they treat you. If they treat you good, okay. Sometimes they just use you to take money. Like they tell you if you have a homey, do it for him. Get food for him every day.

A homey's like a special friend?

Yep. So maybe the gang says every day you gotta buy food for them. If you say no, then they say you gotta do it for your homey. If you don't do it, they get mad.

How can I meet some of these gangbangers?

They're right outside! the boys laughed.

Would one of you mind asking if Soeun and I could talk to them and take their picture for the newspaper?

Sure, the eighth-grader said happily. He flashed down the stairs and quickly returned. —They say sure. They say it'd be cool to be in the paper.

we can't scared of ncha
 we're tag bangers
 cat fight dey - bhe 75 dey
 or calais
 If we go party to we
 get all reed up.

That was how we got introduced to the Crazy Ruthless Kings. I agreed to pay them twenty up front and ten if the interview were satisfactory to me, which I assured them it almost certainly would be. Later they tried to get a tip out of me, just like the homeys that the eighth-grader had told me about. But aside from that they were hospitable young men who took good care of me. Soeun didn't

go over the wall. I lifted her as high as I could, but she didn't have the upper body strength to pull herself over. As for me, I was feeling not so agile anymore, but once I'd climbed upon an abandoned shopping cart I was able to draw myself up onto the top of the wall, which I lay upon on my belly and then straddled. —You sure are old, one CRK guy said in disgust. —Thus encouraged, I jumped down into the deep weeds on the other side and found myself in a long and narrow world between walls, a dingy world, a world of concrete, dirt and head-high weeds through which the CRK, including the two brothers I'd already met, raced as joyously as horses in a new pasture. —From the bridge over there, all that is our hood,¹² a boy said with pride. Orange and Hill to Martin Luther King to Twenty-Third.

Beyond the far wall lay the apartment blocks of Long Beach. A pretty black girl on a balcony was watching us. I waved to her, but she didn't wave back. —They hate us, a boy explained. Sometimes they call the cops on us.

So after that bridge on the left there, whose hood is it?

Mexicans. FK. *Fuck* FK.

And that bridge on the right?

Insane and Casa Latino Boyz. We're like in the middle, and all the Mexicans don't get along with us. This whole thing here, this all our hood. They be chasin' us, and we be chasin' them.

How about the other Asian gangs?

TRG they be cool with us. Asian Boyz, too. See, for our colors we got that cat-

fish-grey. Not quite grey, not quite blue. Blue is TRG. Grey is Asian Boyz. We be in between, keep friendly with 'em both.

How many of you are there?

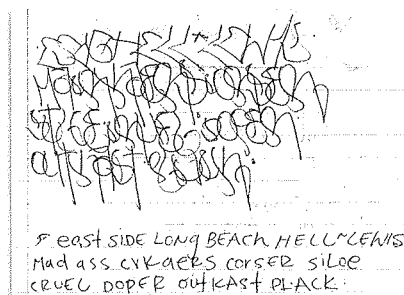
Like a thousand deep! cried one of the main heads. That was Cruel (the others there were Outkast, Corser, Siloe, Doper and Plack because it was only the middle of a weekday; Saturdays and Sundays were when they all turned out.) — I been here for the longest, Cruel said, like five-six years. Like, me and two other homeys, we brung it up.

Hey, we're the craziest tagger gangers in Long Beach! Outkast shouted. Nobody can't see us in Long Beach. We're psycho, man!

Show 'im the masterpiece, man!

There it was: C.R.K., looming in grim, proud outline upon the walls.

The walls were definitely tagged, all right. "CRK" was written everywhere, and then the scrawls and hooks and anchors and beaks of gang writing, which could have been cuneiform as far as I was concerned; they wriggled on top of each other like livid eels in a basket. I had one of the gang write something in tagger style in my notebook, with a "translation" below.



But above all I saw the slashes. Gangs mark their territory like dogs, and then other gangs come and slash out those marks, substituting their own affirmations of presence.

We slash 'em, explained Siloe with satisfaction. See, we start with the blue one, and then they slash that and the brown one come on, and then the green, then the red, then we slash 'em again.

We ain't scared of nobody. We're tag-bangers.

Yeah, we're tag-bangers, said Cruel. Taggers *and* gangbangers.

Why aren't you tagging right now?

Give us two dollars, man, an' we'll go get some paint!

You're already getting thirty from me.

C'mon, man, won't you even give us a little tip? We're *hungry*.

If you buy some crack with that thirty you won't care if you're hungry or not, I said, and they grinned.

How many of you are Cambodian?

We're fifty percent Cambodian—no, ninety percent Cambodian, twenty percent black, twenty percent white, twenty percent Filipino, and twenty percent Lao.

Let's see... That adds up to 170 percent.

Yeah, that's right.

I let the arithmetic pass, entertained by the sad little irony of the boy's remark.

These gangs were supposedly about color. But if anyone of any color could join, then they weren't about that at all, and the territorial skirmishes were even more mindless.

Are there any girls in this gang?

Yeah, like four-five.

Six-seven!

Four-five.

(The two boys' mother told me that she knew of three or four girls in the gang. In her idea it had about ten members, but there might have been many more, she said, who never came to the house. A Cambodian girl at Poly High told me that she thought that CRK had about 150 members. The police department had no information about them.)

Later I met one boy's girlfriend, shy, Vietnamese, with fine brown hair down to the shoulders, and I thought that that much good, at least, had come out of the relocation of these Cambodian families; for in Cambodia and in Vietnam they mainly hate each other, thanks to the stern Vietnamese regime in Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge were expelled; thanks to the murderous Khmer Rouge incursions into Vietnam before that, thanks to centuries of warfare disguised and naked before that and before that; but here in the USA the young ones didn't know or care much about it anymore.

So when you guys get together, what do you like to do?

Oh, we go party, and we get all duded up. Smoke some bud, drink some beer.

Yeah, we party, and we fight. They shoot, we shoot.

When we go, we go, man!

You guys kill anybody?

They waved hands. —We can't tell you that.

But put something positive, said Corser. Put down that sometimes the cops hit us with their guns and stuff for no reason.

See, man, we're the last generation, a boy said self-pityingly. All the other generations hate us. That three-strikes-and-you're-out law doesn't give us a chance. We're Generation X'ers. Put that down, man.

Reader, I put it down, as you see, but I thought to myself that the three strikes law actually gave them two chances. How many chances did somebody need? Still, they were more than half right. It was earlier, before they started going bad, that circumstances had denied them much of a chance.¹³ If their self-defense quickly became aggression, it nonetheless began as a legitimate response to aggression. Why should they have to be hurt?

We can't walk in peace around here, with cops always fuckin' with us, man, Cruel said. Sometimes they put us with TRG even though we don't do nothing. They just say we're TRG. Then we get a record.

Who's more of a problem, cops, blacks or Mexicans?

Cops! they shouted.

That was another sad thing, that they'd ganged together at least partly for protection from one threat, and now it had become more complicated and they had new problems. I'm not saying that they held no responsibility for what they were and what they did; of course every conscious human being must be available for judgment in his own or others' eyes; and if CRK had in fact harmed anybody, I blame them for it, but when I think about my skinhead friend Bootwoman Marisa, who was held down while black girls extracted some of her teeth with pliers, or when I think of that Cambodian eighth-grader with the screwdriver scars on his arms, I have to cut them some slack.

'Cause back then, a boy was telling me, I was just a breakdancer. Then one day some Mexicans come to me. They say, TRG? I said no, but those Mexicans busted my nose.

So when do you think violence is justified?

When someone fuck us up!

When we see a Mexican, 'cause no other choice. Ain't no such thing as one-on-one. One Mexican comes to fight with me, all my homeys gonna come help me and take him down. That's what Mexicans do to us. They just beat us down. Any Mexican, we beat 'em down.

How about, say, a three-year-old Mexican kid?

Twelve years and under, we don't hurt 'em. 'Cause we got heart even though the Mexicans don't. But our age, we gotta beat 'em down.

(Asian gangs copy Hispanic gangs, Sørensen had told me. Simple as that. A few things they don't copy, though. A Hispanic gang pulling a drive-by shooting will yell out their gang moniker. The Asians think that's stupid. They don't want to get caught.)

They were up upon the wall again now, and then a boy shouted: Undercover! Look at that white car!

They leaped off the wall.

I lowered myself back down onto Signal Hill and went into the two boys' mother's house, where Soeun was waiting for me.

How much did you give them? she said.

Thirty.

That's good, because you give them something to be happy, she said.

(This is just what someone would have said to me in Cambodia. I was pleased.)

Soeun, ask the mother how she feels about them being in CRK.

As long as they respect her, listen to her, it's okay.

Is she ever afraid?

She afraid. They have a gun shooting out there by that wall one time. Only two-three shots, but couple people get hurt.

Anything else?

Police come inside today to see if she hide anybody.

Was she angry?

Little bit, but cannot speak English, so must do.

Is she afraid some other gang might come into her house and take money?

Afraid.

Did she ever talk about that with her sons?

Yes, she ask, but they answer, yes, they can protect her, but younger one is too young and the other be only himself, so she doesn't know how her son can protect her.

STATEMENT OF DETECTIVE NORM SØRENSEN, GANG VIOLENCE SUPPRESSION (CONTINUED)

Currently in the city of Long Beach we have five major street gangs of southeast Asian description. Of those, the Cambodian gangs are our biggest problem. A realistic figure for the total number of Cambodians would be about 80,000. That's the largest number in the country.¹⁴ In Long Beach we have about 800 identified gang members.

These are nontraditional street gangs. They began their criminal activities largely in response to the Hispanic gangs. The black gangs mainly have an economic motive, the Hispanics are all about turf and territory, and the Asians are about protection, and also economics. We have six hundred car thefts per month. Half are stolen by Asian gangs.

Crimes against Asians rarely come to trial. Fear on the part of the victim, a lack of familiarity with our laws, and easy communication within the relatively small Asian community all play their part.

A SON'S TALE

What was going to happen to Cruel, Outkast, Corser, Siloe, Doper and Plack, to say nothing of the two listless brothers? Maybe the police searches would never catch them doing anything illegal, and possibly some would graduate from high school and get out of the gang; they'd marry, or not, and have children like the two little Asian girls, probably Khmer, I saw playing ball in a fenced-in yard just off Anaheim Street, and maybe one of the boys would get shot or maybe he wouldn't; a few might end up in prison in Stockton like the sons of some of Soeun's friends. On a cloudless afternoon, traffic backed up for half a block from PCH, with Signal Hill all dried out and grim above, Soeun and I met a boy, Laotian, let's say, one of Pastor Joe's, who'd turned out all right. He was twenty-one and in high school, but at least he was in high school. He might have been the voice of the Crazy Ruthless Kings' future. He said: I got a couple friends that I went around with. They started ditching school, so I ran around with them. I went through four different high schools. First I kept getting beaten up by Mexicans, then I got kicked out for fighting Mexicans, and finally I dropped out because it was so boring.

You were in TRG?

Yes, sir.

STATEMENT OF DETECTIVE SØRENSEN (CONTINUED)

Is TRG the most dangerous?

Probably not. Probably the Asian Boyz are the most dangerous. We just shut down one guy who's responsible for quite a few murders. He's a compulsive gambler and a psychopath. I expect he'll be killing people in prison.

A SON'S TALE (CONTINUED)

And then how did your life go? I said.

Three years in jail for attempted murder, the boy said.

What happened?

We got in a fight with another gang, and we beat 'em up with pipes. I was in there until I was seventeen. I been around eight whole years, just wasting the time. I gave my mom all kind of hard time.

Did she visit you?

Every visiting hours. She was always there for me. In jail, everybody pray to the God they believe: If I get out, I promise to be good. People in there wanna get out, but people out there wanna go in, to be tough. They think it's cool.

Why do gangbangers like to hurt people?

They have too many prides in themselves, and that's why so many fightings and shootings.

In a gang, when is violence justified? When is it okay to hurt people?

If we know that someone's our enemy, that's his loss. We just beat 'im up. I went to hospital a couple of times. I know how it feels to have the heat of the bullet go by.

And after you were in jail, what happened to you?

Well, the bad part is, the thing I regret the most is the high school years. I try to make up my years now in the Cambodian Christian school. Right now, my goal is to help the brothers. I told my brothers I'm sorry I was a bad example to you, but it's too late. Yesterday my brother just got beat up by Longos, beat up bad. So I give up my friends. That's the way to change. I think my family is more important than my friends. I come to church. That don't make me perfect. But God, He's patient. I wanna see my mom smile. The thing about Christians is they train the child to love the parents. We Asians, we love the parents but we scared to hug 'em, we scared to kiss 'em. What I wanna do is tell 'em, think about your parents, and believe that they love you. They carried you in their arms when they were running away from the Khmer Rouge, so how can you think they don't love you?

It must have been hard to leave your friends, I said.

I love all my friends. You know what? When my parents sent me back to Laos for a year, to try to straighten me out, when I come back, my friends wanna throw a party for me. And they don't have any money to do it right, so you know what they do? They rob a house. I didn't go. I told my friends, no, I wanna stay with my family. And the next thing I know, they're calling me collect from jail. They all got busted for that robbery. Thank God I didn't go to that party.

STATEMENT OF DETECTIVE SØRENSEN (CONTINUED)

All the members are friends and they're within a three- or four-year age range. Then, newer, younger ones form a clique. The older guys are veterans by now. The younger ones splinter off. Now, with the Cambodians it works just the same. The males, they meet as a social group, at special places where they feel free, we-don't-want-no-shit type places. Rec Park is one of those places. This crowd takes on its own identity. The people there start talking, and there's usually one guy who's charismatic, who everyone else seems to follow. And all the sudden it just happens. He becomes the most admired and the most feared. If he's a good guy, they'll be normal and talk about women or politics or whatever. But if he's a bad boy, he'll recruit people, even schoolboys with no prior experience, into committing crimes for him. I always like to think of the lemming story. He intimidates them. He can even say, if you don't come with me, I'll kill your family and eat 'em.

A MINOR INCIDENT

Should I have watched a gangbanger kill somebody's family and eat them? I didn't feel like it. Maybe you want more from this story; sometimes the features editors who pay my way tell me that I ought to "push the envelope," to clarify by making things more extreme; probably if I'd hung around with the right people I could have seen some kid's dead body. But it was not an existence of concentrated war that most of these people lived. Life dragged on, for the most part, in an unremarkably shabby way. For the same reason, I don't want to say that Little Phnom Penh was worse than it was. Phnom Penh itself had been worse until quite recently; even a mere two months previous, on my latest trip to Cambodia, I'd seen slummier sights. Long Beach's replica of Phnom Penh had its working-class houses with fenced but fertile yards and sometimes lovely trees and flower-bushes. The wall of one auto repair place offered a mural of Cambodian dancers. The New Paradise restaurant had been torched by a Cambodian gang, so I heard and read, but it was now rebuilt, and Soeun and I ate there every day; she said that the food was better than ever. I don't deny that Anaheim is the Street of Half-Dead Signs:

'S MARKET

(which is to say, *On's Market*)

QUOR STORE

HEP LEE KE

(which is to say, *Hep Lee Market*)

L
Q
U
O

But I went into a Mexican place on Anaheim with trumpeting music and bright walls and tiers of rainbow-sugared cookies, bowls of limes, platoons of Tabasco sauce and plenty of fresh orange juice. The waitress was in a plaid miniskirt, her hair halfway down her back, and the TV grinned and shouted in Spanish. The chef was laughing and ringing his counter-bell in rhythm with the jukebox, and another cook rang his bell, too, and the waitresses were flashing their sparkling choppers. Everyone was friendly to me there. I never heard a single gunshot on that entire visit.

But, as I've said, this story is less about gunshots than about ugly little acts, which is why perhaps the best way to end it is to say that on my very last day in Long Beach, right before Soeun drove me to the airport, we went by prearrangement to Jefferson Middle School to meet some members of FNR, which means Fucking No Respect, and as soon as we pulled up some Latino kids threw a rock at our car which almost broke the back window; turning around, I could see them pointing at Soeun and mouthing something. I was sickened. That heavy, ugly slamming sound was kin to the smash of a mortar round or the thud of a bullet (almost lost in the concussion that precedes it) into a house or a helmet—all reifications of deliberate hatred, of the desire to bring pain into the world. "Cruelty," "malice"—these words are but sounds incomparably weaker than the sound of that rock striking Soeun's car—not inhuman, that sound (though human voices cannot shape it), not meaningless—oh, it has a meaning, all right! That's where the poison of it, the pain and the fear of it derive, from that message which even an animal can understand: *I want to hurt you. I hate you.* It is so easy to read about atrocities, to see their evidence just as most visitors to Phnom Penh have seen the skulls on the shelves, and even to be moved by them, but that does not mean that they are comprehended. You can see

how long it takes me to write about one thrown stone; one can say that Soeun and I understood it instantly when we felt and heard it against the car, but of course we did not understand it as we would have if it had wounded our flesh. I have sometimes contemplated the sensations that condemned people who used to get stoned to death in Biblical times must have felt. Sometimes the stones must have missed, but that didn't do you any good because the event was just going to go on and on until they hit you and smashed you. What happened at Jefferson was nothing like that—a casual expression of the message, a monster's half-asleep snarl, almost playful: neither physical pain nor property damage, merely a shock, and a flash of fear, and then anger, and Soeun's face suddenly pale and old (she was my age) and then when we got out of the car to inspect the damage, the kids streaming coolly by, a few grinning down at us from stairs or railings, the throwers already out of sight in the crowd, I couldn't help but expect another stone to come, maybe in the side of Soeun's head...

Poor Soeun just happened to be the wrong color. She did her best to support her parents and her three sons, each of whom derived from a different husband; she didn't have enough money to give them all new socks the same month, but she did what she could. Her first husband, to whom the Khmer Rouge had married her at command, sight unseen, but whom she'd gradually come to love, had been killed by a land mine when they escaped from Cambodia; her second husband had also died (she told me that her third husband was only separated from her but an acquaintance insisted that he'd died, too). Her parents stayed inside most of the time with the door locked and the gate locked. Her sons went to school and watched out for Latino boys with screwdrivers. Soeun drove through Little Phnom Penh with her windows tightly rolled up, convinced, with some reason, that she was surrounded by people who hated her.

After she'd begun to trust me, she said to me: After I get robbed two times by the blacks, somebody give me this—and she lifted up the floormat of her car and showed me a long, sharp, upcurving knife with a good solid hilt. —If police catch me I get in trouble, but I don't care. Police don't help me when I get robbed.

She said to me: My boy, he get beat so many times by Mexicans. Teacher they can't do nothing. They don't want to do nothing. Sometimes American way is not so good.

If Soeun had been a high school girl, I am sure that she would have joined a gang. I would have, if I'd been her.

(Detective Sørensen had remarked: They keep their crimes within their own Asian community. We estimate that only one to two percent of Asian crimes are reported. Crimes against Asians are difficult to prosecute because there are never any witnesses.)

It was only a rock, after all—why do I go on so about a rock? —We got out to inspect the cracked window. The hot sidewalk was crowded with shouting kids, one

of whom, a tall black boy, pushed past me and jostled Soeun so sharply that she almost fell. —Oh, sorry! said Soeun reflexively. —The sign warned that people could be searched for weapons. Asian girls were sitting on the steps, waiting for their families to pick them up, running fingers through their long black hair. A black boy approached me, and when I nodded to him he smiled gently and greeted me back, but Soeun shrunk away. The boy continued on, alone, and I saw a knot of Asian boys on the steps who watched him with unkind eyes, their fingers snaking in gang signs.

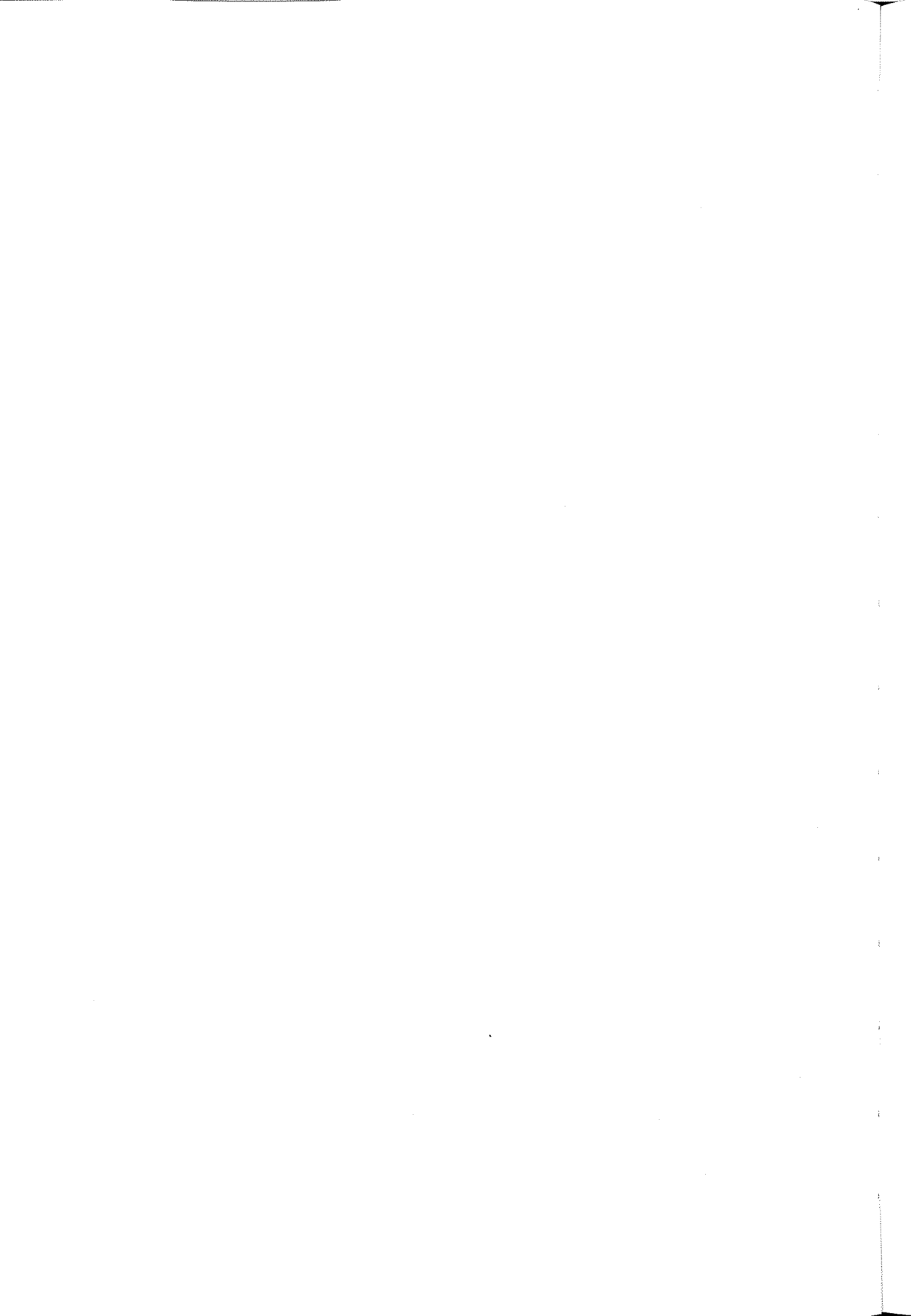
A LETTER FROM SOEUN

05-26-96

TO: BILL

Hi, How are you Bill? It along times that I didn't heard anything from you. So do you have anything new? I'm live over here have a bad news about my son got kick out from Wilson High, because he had a fight with Mexican and they think he related to the gangster. So he got kick out from school right now, I wish you can help me all that problem, I have a hearing from head board on June 3rd at 8:30 and go to court on June 12th at 8:30 also, and I need all the people to support my son, because he is a good boy, he never have a problem, alot a times that Mexican try to fight with him, he always stay away from them, but this time he couldn't control his temper, so he took trash can and trough back to them and he got himself caught with the principle.

I hope you can help me and call talk to the head board of districk school and principle of Wilson high, just said that you know my family and my son that he a good boy he never related to any gangster...



KICKIN' IT (2000)

If you wave the flag, you're family. White people have their Confederate flag or their Aryan flag tattooed on 'em; that's their family. We just be doin' the same.

CAMBODIAN GANGSTER, CRAZY BROTHER CLAN (2000)

Stockton, California, is a largish city whose glamor derives principally from its Asparagus Festival. The famous Delta breeze, which cools summer nights down to tolerability, too frequently passes Stockton by, and so does everything else. Unemployment in San Joaquin County is twice the state average.¹ Enter the international Port of Stockton and you might well find no sentry at the gate. Drive around the navy post on Rough and Ready Island, and you may spy a lone forklift operator, or nobody. Or, in the more tactful words of one Delta enthusiast, "I always enjoy looking at the mothball fleet here, even though the assortment is not as grand as it had been in years past."² Downtown Stockton is busier; many of the old brickfront hotels survive, transformed by time from doss houses into picturesque relics. In its weary journey from Mexico to Canada, Interstate Five

passes through this core, and if you follow it to the March Lane exit and turn right, you'll find yourself amidst the ugliness of present day California life.

March Lane offers the voyager a long wide flatness, sparkling with sun-glare, which divides the corporate cubes, strip malls, and green-lawned chain hotels from the dead grass and fences where the Kentfield housing project begins. Although I've used the singular, sundry "apartments," "estates" and the like proclaim themselves within the project mass; and indeed the proud boosters of Kentfield whom you are about to meet³ consider their "hood" to extend only along the east side of the street. Cross the street, and you're in alien territory. If you keep walking west, more or less paralleling March Lane, you'll pass briefly through a middle class suburb, and then, a sweaty half hour after you started, you'll reach the antipodal neighborhood of Manchester. Like Kentfield, Manchester is predominantly southeast Asian.⁴ Cambodians, Laotians, hill tribes such as the Hmong, Filipinos, and Vietnamese all rub shoulders. Black tenants are few, and whites fewer still. (One chunky white woman proudly referred to herself as an honorary Asian, because she'd just given birth to a half-Cambodian baby, whom her friends jokingly suggested that she name O.G., or Old Gangster). Almost all the people I met in the two neighborhoods were Cambodian. The teenagers and young adults first saw the light in Thai refugee camps.

The other tenants of Kentfield and Manchester are myriads of tiny kittens. They sport on tenement floors, or purr feebly in the palms of children. Several times people would urge me to take a kitten with me, because otherwise some kid would only break its legs or put out its eyes.

Unlike Kentfield, Manchester is a self-contained fortress, its apartments drawn in around courtyards where families sit in the hot sun. Kentfield does boast a park where in the night time gangsters sometimes like to sit at picnic tables under the cool trees, but this park lies at the extremity of the neighborhood, not in the middle of it. Think of Manchester more or less as a walled square. Think of Kentfield as a rectangle stretched out and attenuated almost into a line, really a coast regularly embayed by apartments. Each bay is entered through its own gate, which boasts a NO LOITERING sign. And at each gate, you may be sure, there are loiterers, although the manager comes every half hour to warn them to move; and so they stand there holding the line, gazing across the street watching nothing happen.

On account of that architecture, Kentfield felt more threatening to me than its rival. To go anywhere, I had to walk that line, passing gate after gate, whose keepers were sometimes imbued with the aggressive purposefulness of frontier guards or termite soldiers. In Manchester, I needed only to enter one gate, and the project enfolded me protectively. I might also have felt safer there because the manager had recently expelled a dozen gangsters, an act for which their remaining colleagues naturally hated her. Just two weeks since, I was told, she'd shot a girl named B.G. in the face. The reason she had shot B.G. was that she had dared to get into B.G.'s business and so B.G. had punched her in the head. B.G. was in the hospital now in a

coma. Well, actually she wasn't in the hospital at all. The bullet had only grazed her. And it hadn't been the manager who'd fired it, but the manager's husband. "There is some truth to that story," said the Stockton police. "However, the manager wasn't the aggressor; it was this B.G. female. But that was pretty close to the way it went down." (A homeboy named Reptile⁵ hadn't been there, but he'd heard the shots. "That's when I go home," he said. "So the police come, and they wave their guns around; they look like one of those James Bond movies.") The gangsters were half-literally up in arms about what had befallen B.G., but when I expressed a desire to meet her, it turned out that they didn't even know where she lived; she was among the expelled. Actually, they said, they were a little afraid of B.G. She was pretty mean. Even if I were able to find her and knock on her door, the best that would happen would be that B.G. would cuss me out. They didn't advise me to visit. They really weren't that interested in B.G. The point was how hateful the manager was. "She's one of us but she don't like even her own race," one homeboy said. "She want to straighten us out by giving up our culture." They told me that she had managed another housing project in Stockton and got attacked there, too, which proved how disagreeable she made herself to any true human being—that is, I guess, to any gangster. I never met the manager to ask her side of it. What would have been the use? The gangsters would have hated me then, which would have crimped my style because this story is supposed to be about gangsters.

Well, is there anything special about Asian gangs? I hardly know to commence on this vast subject. Here is one answer: "Our Vietnamese and Chinese are into the economic crimes now, but they almost *invented* the home invasion robbery, really," said Detective Jim Kang of the Sacramento gang violence unit. The way he said it, he sounded almost proud of the Asian gangs. Perhaps his pride was equivalent to that of the herpetologist who discourses on a particularly venomous species of cobra. "They started as street gangs," he went on. "They emulated the black gangs. They had the funky hair, you know. But they always dressed nicer. They drove cars that their parents bought them. And some of them, especially the Vietnamese and the Chinese, were into education. For the Hmong and the Lao, though, education is not as much of a value. Around here we have Mien, Lao, Viet, Chinese, Viet Ching, Cantonese and they're very different." How would he have classified the Cambodians? God only knew. There were very few of them in Sacramento.

ASIAN GANGS IN STOCKTON: AN INCOMPLETE LIST

GANG	FULL NAME	COLORS	ENEMIES
<i>Kentfield</i>			
OCG	Original Crip Gang	royal blue	CBC, LTC, TRG, ABZ, AC
KC	Kentfield Crips	ditto	ditto
<i>Manchester</i>			
MLS	Moon Light Strangers	red	all except TRG and OG
TRG	Tiny Rascal Gang	grey	ABZ
CBC	Crazy Brother Clan	black	OCG, KC, ABZ, AC
<i>Oak Park and elsewhere</i>			
ABZ	Asian Boyz	navy blue	OCG, KC, TRG
CBZ	Crazy Boyz (jr. ABZ)	ditto	ditto
AC	Asian Crips	blue	CBC, LTC, TRG, ???
LTC	Loc Town Crips	navy blue	ditto
OB	Original Bloods	red	???

SOURCE: L. N., 13 YEARS OLD, KENTFIELD

Kentfield's representatives were the Original Crip Gang, once known as the Original Cambodian Gang until they started admitting members of other races, and the Kentfield Crips, an allied group now somewhat in decline. The colors of both were royal blue. Manchester, on the other hand, was a redoubt of the notorious Tiny Rascal Gang, whose colors were grey,⁶ the Moon Light Strangers, who wore red, and the Crazy Brother Clan, formerly known as the Cold Blooded Cambodians, who had changed their name for the same reason as the OCGs, and who wore black ("we claim the black rag"). In short, Kentfield was Crip and Manchester was Blood. Kentfield and Manchester were enemies.

A Manchester homeboy explained to me how strangers were greeted: "If you're a teenager, they ask you where you come from, and if you tell 'em the wrong thing or if you wear a blue rag, that's it. This is a Blood block."

"Manchester's a hot spot, all right," they said in Kentfield.

"What happens if you go to Kentfield?" I asked the Manchester set.

"Get our ass beat."

When I asked a young Kentfield wannabe just what a Crip was, he twitched and said, "A Crip, I dunno. I never thought of that."

"Why are the Crips and Bloods each other's enemies?"

"They fought with each other," he replied, not much interested in these questions. He was thirteen. He knew every Asian gang's colors. He knew who was Crip and

who was Blood. And yet he couldn't tell me what or why. The next day I found him and some junior OCGs playing happily with a steak knife, and he started flourishing it at my heart, stabbing the ground, hacking at hedge-leaves. His brother was worried about him.

With or without good reason, Kentfield and Manchester remained unsafe. For fear of armed robbery Domino's Pizza refused to deliver to either place after sunset.⁷ The soft drink machine at Manchester was empty for the same reason, residents told me.⁸ I have already described how Kentfield's tree-grown street of swollen garbage cans unnerved me at night, although because I never went there alone, nothing worse happened than a few threats and an attempted camera-snatching. One of my guides, a fellow of college age whose family had just moved from Manchester to Kentfield because the addicts who'd shared the apartment had stopped paying their half of the rent, went out to work at the gas station one day, and on his return to that home-smell of rancid vinegar and dirty socks discovered that some black men in ski masks had burst in, pistol-whipped his uncle and father in the face, and harvested 10,000 dollars' worth of cash and valuables (his family had been running an illegal gambling house). That had happened only last year. He'd felt frightened then and he felt frightened now. "It's kinda spooky," he said. "We got paranoid about the locks. And then the last time, it happened two months ago. It was like half dream, half reality. I was sleeping when it happened right next to my window. Someone just passed by and shot..." —We were sitting around with his ex-homeboys back in Manchester when I raised the subject of this home invasion, to see what they would say, and it turned out that he hadn't bothered to tell them before and they weren't much interested; it was not only old news, but commonplace.

When I asked Sergeant Jim Hughes of the Stockton Police Gang Violence Suppression Unit whether Manchester or Kentfield was more violent, he replied, "Well, they're doin' drivebys and assaults with a deadly weapon. Both of those gangs are pretty violent." He believed that their numbers in Stockton overall ran in the hundreds. "The Manchester boys probably have a few more members."

Unlike Bosnia, Colombia or Jamaica, those two rival neighborhoods (whose residents referred to them as ghettos) could boast no recent homicides. In 1997 Stockton had been afflicted by twenty gang murders. In 1999 only six people were killed by gangs in the entire city—four of them by Asians, the other two by Hispanics.⁹ Halfway through the year 2000, when I wrote this, one homicide alone could be attributed to an Asian gang. Nobody I met lived in acute fear. "You use your common sense," said a Manchester resident. "You know where you can't go." (In Bosnia they used to say the same, with the same shrug: Why argue with the facts of life?) And exceptions to the "where you can't go" rule abounded. I've already mentioned my guide, who lived in Kentfield yet could visit Manchester anytime on account of his prior residence there. Indeed, he felt less safe in Kentfield, because they didn't yet know him there very well; he was always away working or studying;

but because he was not a current member of any gang, nobody had any personal stake in hurting him. His thirteen-year-old brother, the Kentfield wannabe who didn't know what a Crip was, was much less free. Half-heartedly he offered to take me to Manchester, where he still had relatives, but, fearing for his safety, I worked with him only in Kentfield, where he generally sat on his skateboard half a block away from me, cupping his chin in his hand, flicking a fingernail against his teeth, his eyes anxiously crawling all over me as he tapped his foot. He never stopped believing that I was a police informant. (Still, he took my money.) He refused outright to go to Oak Park, where the Asian Boyz lived. Those gangsters were arch-enemies of both the Kentfield and the Manchester sets. (According to Sergeant Hughes, that hood was no worse than either Kentfield or Manchester, so I made no effort to go there.) The thirteen-year-old said: "I can't go to Oak Park since I been to school with some of them. They were friends of me, when I went to school. Then this gang thing got in the way. Just because I'm from Kentfield now, they think I'm in KC. If I went there, they'd try to beat me up, maybe kill me." —But his elder brother lived in the same house, and *he* could enter Oak Park without fear—another indication that the thirteen-year-old was fast becoming a gang satellite.

These neighborhood feuds were thus not only arbitrary, but subject to individual amendment. One known member of the Crazy Brother Clan in Manchester could pass the Crip sentries of Kentfield unmolested as long as he minded his Ps and Qs, because his sister lived in that alien hood.

"How do the Kentfield set treat you?" I asked him. "Are they polite to you?"

"No. They treat me like I'm invisible. They're not polite but they won't hurt me—'cause they afraid of what my homeys might do," he added for the benefit of those homeys, who sat drinking beer beside us.¹⁰

"If you wear a certain thing in a certain neighborhood," said a certain "block leader" in Manchester, "the only people gonna trip is your own ethnic group. I was in Oakland, wearin' red in a blue hood, and the only thing those black guys said to me was, 'You from Stockton, huh?'"

This is why the stupid hatreds based on gang affiliation¹¹ seemed to me potentially revocable in each given case. In Kentfield there dwelled a brawny Laotian whose torso sported half a dozen fearsome tattoos (the most impressive of which read KILLER). In this Crip neighborhood he strolled merrily around, greeting people with a "what's up, Blood?" In reply he got merely a few laughingly tolerant obscenities, for he'd grown up there and everyone had known him before he'd gotten himself initiated (or *jumped in* as they call it) into a Blood-affiliated gang.

Street gangsterism, in short, follows no more coherent a system than did the expedient wars and alliances of ancient Greek city-states. The Cambodian gangsters whom I'd met four years earlier in Long Beach all insisted that they'd signed on out of simple self-defense. Black and Hispanic gangsters attacked them in the high school hallways. Their parents complained; the principal couldn't help them. What

were they supposed to do? But in Stockton, if I may quote the immortal words of a certain Mr. Scarface from Kentfield, "All here, all the Asian people have Asian enemies. Why we gonna make enemies with the other races?"

"Originally we were all Cambodian gangsters," Scarface went on, "but then we jumped Mexicans and blacks into our set, so we changed from *Original Cambodian Gangsters* to *Original Crip Gang*. Sure we're Crips. But our color is different from other Crips, 'cause we're *unique*."

"Do black Crips respect the OCGs?"

"Sure. Blacks are like, *what's up, cuz?*"

This is logical, for the slang, colors, names and organization of the Asian gangs appeared to be largely based on black exemplars. "It's not that they *want* to be black or Hispanic," said Detective Kang in Sacramento. "They're living in an environment where that sort of subculture is everywhere. That's what they understand to be something cool. When you look at some of our southeast Asian gangsters who emulate blacks, they give it their own flavor. For instance, jumping in," which means getting initiated through a beating. "Some do it like the blacks do. Some do not. With some of our Hmong gangs, you can simply rape a girl and get into a gang. Also, the turf wars you see with Latino gangs, it's not really there with the Asian gangs. With them it's about glory. Sure the Asians are different. Asians are more apt to shoot. I want you to tell people that Asian gangs are a big problem, a very, very serious threat to public safety." So they were different. Still and all, some were pretty black. It always disconcerted me when these Cambodian boys called each other "nigger." As a member of the Crazy Brother Clan remarked, "*They* say, what's up, Blood? *We* say, what's up, Crazy? That's just Ebonics, is what it is." Several of his Manchester homeboys idolized the martyred black rapper Tupac Shakur, and when I asked why their role model wasn't Cambodian like them, they replied that there would never be another Tupac, not ever, "because that the *life* he's rappin' about. That's true."

"I *been* through that," said another boy. "He tells it like it is. Nobody can be as big as Tupac."

What had he been through? Well, let me introduce him to you by saying that he wore an ankle bracelet. (The gangster way to describe his situation is *they put him on ankle*.) His name was San.

"My life is fucked up," he said.

I asked why, and he replied: "Cause I live in a bad society, in a bad neighborhood."

"I got shot at like seven-eight times," he said. "Didn't hit me, though."

"Why did they shoot at you?"

"Cause people don't get along with me," he yawned, scratching at the ankle bracelet. (Had he begun to descend the steps from his mother's apartment, the alarm would have sounded.) "Car come drivin' past, and they shot, 'cause I live in a wrong neighborhood and always wear red."

"Who were they?"

"ABZ," he said.

ABZ meant Asian Boyz. They were Crips, hence enemies of the Manchester set. "If you wear a red dickey and you go to Oak Park," a CBC gangster explained, "they gonna hit you up right there, 'cause you diss¹² their *colors*." In Oak Park as in Kentfield, homeboys "wore the blue rag,"¹³ so you might think that those two latter neighborhoods would be allies, but a Kentfield gangster summed up his color-counterparts thus, with many a bitter laugh: "They *love* us. They call us *best friend*. Sparkles come out of their heart—*pop, pop, pop*, right into our hood!" No one remembered exactly the genesis of this hatred, but one story went that in ancient times an OCG and an ABZ had quarreled over a girl, requiring homeboys on both sides to step in—proof of the inconveniences of blind solidarity.¹⁴

"So how did you get put on ankle, San?"

"I did a home invasion and got locked up. I was with somebody else but only I got caught."

"What made you want to go into that house?"

"Cause I didn't like that person. I was gonna hit him up."

"You mean hurt him or you mean kill him?"

"Something like that. He jumped me a couple times. He claimed another color of rag. At night time I knocked on the door and walked in. I didn't see him. I threatened his wife, his kids, everybody. I wouldn't have hurt 'em; I just wanted to find out where her husband was at. Then the police came."

"What happened next?"

"They slammed me on the ground five times. One cop was white and one was black. They took me in. They locked me up in juvenile hall for a month. I violated my probation too much, so they put that thing on me," and he touched the ankle bracelet, which was a loop of some vinyl-like material with a black box on the back of the leg.

It was my visits to San that introduced me to Manchester's black-grimed wooden landings where the young men squat in the evenings, drinking their cans of coconut juice or beer which they can buy at practically any neighbor's apartment no matter how young they are, and they crouch there waiting for something to happen. This is what they call *kickin' it*. Sometimes they wake up as early as one or two in the afternoon, but usually they don't come out for hours more, at least not in the summer heat (when I was in Stockton it was more than 100 degrees every day), and when they do, a guest must wait and wait (it's like being in Asia), until slowly, slowly they come out, with weary sweaty faces. They sit with their legs lolling in front of them (which would be very rude in Cambodia), or they squat cross-legged in good Cambodian style, looking down through the grating into the hard-shadowed sunlight of late afternoon. Far below, old men in sarongs are sitting in the courtyard, children are playing ball, and the smell of barbeque tangs the air. Those civil-

ians will go home by ten-o'-clock, but the gangsters will not. When they drink their *forty*, they pour out a few drops onto the ground in remembrance of their beer-drinking homeboys now gone underground. Lapsing in and out of the Khmer language, they tell tall tales about valiant but eternally inconclusive skirmishes with the enemy. (Why inconclusive? A classic study on seventeenth-century Iroquoians provides what I believe to be the answer: *The major reason that the Huron gave for waging war was to avenge the injuries that warriors from other tribes had inflicted on them. . . . Since neither side regarded such killings as anything but fresh injuries, the result was a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. . . . War was also the principal means by which young men acquired the personal prestige that assured them the respect of their elders and an influential voice in the affairs of their village in later life.*)¹⁵ On those hot evenings, they look across the fences and into distant stairwells and curtained windows. Some crouch stolid and grim; another flickers his hands impassionedly, crying, "It's like that little saying in biology, *survival of the fittest*. Some people been raised to kill! I gotta do what I gotta do to live, y'all!" He's posturing, but they're entertained by his eloquence. He talks and talks. The grim ones half-listen, which passes the time. They smoke cigarettes. One of them yawns and rises to buy four or five more beers from the old lady next door. They get fresh with each other, calling each other *bitch*. Maybe a *hood rat* will come by and some of them can fuck her, or, as they'd term it, *hit her in, hit some skin*. (As a junior OCG member in Kentfield described those damsels, "They're just like a roll of railroad track that's gettin' laid all over the country, you know.") Maybe they can sell some D (dope), if they don't smoke it up themselves. *Grinding*, which means selling crack, comprises another fine occupation.

Mainly, what they do is nothing. Waiting for something is the same as waiting for nothing. After all, what could possibly happen? —A shooting, maybe. —In Kentfield I heard that drivebys used to happen every night, but now once a week was more like it. A Manchester boy said that shootings occurred only "once in a hundred days, but we have to watch ourselves." The last night that I was in Kentfield I heard no gun-blasts, but suddenly blue lights flashed beneath the cool trees and two white policemen approached slowly, asking in mild tones, "All right, who was shooting?" They were frisking everybody. One of the first people they processed was my frail, myopic guide, who as I mentioned was not in any gang, had no gang tattoos, and always conducted himself in a quiet and straightforward manner; he stood with his hands behind his neck while they went through his wallet, called him an asshole and told him they were going to write him a fucking ass ticket. They had me take my hands out of my pocket, questioned me, warned me against loitering, and dismissed me. When I refused to leave until they'd finished with my guide, it got ugly, but only a little, and he came with me soon enough, both of us a little shaken (but I'd been more shaken a quarter-hour earlier by the threats of some Kentfield gangsters), and we never did find out if there had been any shooting. —And the previous night down in Manchester, I'd also heard no shots

when a pair of white cops came striding into the courtyard, their walkie-talkies crackling loudly and unintelligibly, their voices unintelligible, too; and the underage gangsters with whom I was sitting quickly hid their beers back in the plastic bag, watching the policemen's backs dwindle until they'd reached an apartment on the far side of the courtyard in whose doorway they stood for awhile, questioning someone; then they swung around, proceeding slowly toward us, their faces now upturning as they reached the bottom of the stairs, the gangsters pretending not to notice until the cops had passed through the tunnel beneath us and slowly returned to their patrol car. Now when it was safe the gangsters talked big about wanting to get them and how if cops could have guns, *they* should have guns; but none of them knew why the police had come. Later, several Manchester residents insisted to me that there'd been a driveby of a dozen shots, right in the middle of the volleyball game in the vacant lot where the old women grew their vegetables. Those reports were probably true. The drivebys I heard about were literally and metaphorically small-caliber stuff. The bullet wounds which the Kentfield homeboys so proudly showed off had been made by .22s or .25s almost invariably; I saw one 9-millimeter injury and that was it. For the reader unfamiliar with guns (or *straps* as a gangster would call them), I might mention that I can shoot my .22 target pistol inside a closet (two phone books are more than enough of a backstop) and the shot remains inaudible outside the house. So what constitutes a Stockton driveby? From the movies we might imagine a carload of gangsters armed with assault rifles and high capacity semiautos. More often than not, it's pathetic kid stuff. "Everybody has a strap," they'd toughly assure me, but I can't tell you how many boys whined at me to buy them guns or give them mine, because they didn't own any. The only driveby story I heard direct from the perpetrator went like this: A fresh young Kentfield Crip went to Oak Park (for what purpose he wouldn't say) and quite naturally got jumped by the Asian Boyz. ("Even though you're bangin' Blood, you're cool with me," said a Crip. "If you're ABZ, that's a different story.") To hear the young KC tell it, there were ten of the enemy, one of whom pulled a gun, but he miraculously got away. Why deflate his exaggerations? It might even have been true that some possession-proud ABZ "fingerpointed" him with a pistol for fun and intimidation.¹⁶ Whatever actually happened, this KC felt so angry and humiliated, he told me, that the next night he could not forbear to pull a driveby. In other words, he waited until dark, *got on his bicycle*, rode to Oak Park and discharged a few shots more or less at random from his older brother's .25 pistol, which he then threw away in panic while pedaling home. When I asked whether he'd hurt anybody, he hung his head and confessed that he hadn't. But then, trying to look me in the eye, he proclaimed that he'd made his statement, because his bullets "passed right through four houses." A .25 is not much more powerful than a .22, and if you remember my two phone books you can judge for yourself how far his bullets could have penetrated. So it is possible that the driveby at Manchester, and the shooting at Kentfield the follow-

ing night, both really happened, but that only people in the immediate vicinity could hear them. "Oh, they come through all the time," said a Manchester homeboy named Gremlin. "They let off six or seven shots and then go. Police come," he laughed. "All they do is collect the evidence." —Gremlin wanted to be tough about it all. But another boy said: "When a car comes back, we get scared."

Drivebys were the only thing that San's arthritic old mother feared in her new life in America. One wall of her living room was a Buddhist shrine. (San's room was a Tupac shrine, and he said to me: "I don't believe in nothin'. I still got this Buddha necklace, though.") Thanking me because the American government had thoughtfully brought her to Stockton, where it was hot and humid just as in Cambodia, she offered ice cream and begged me to teach her son right and wrong, because she couldn't. She was like so many of the Cambodian parents who didn't know how to raise their children here. Bewildered peasants who couldn't speak English, they stayed home day and night, except maybe to go sit in the courtyard. Sometimes their sons continued to respect them, sometimes not. "Take off your shoes, be courteous—fuck all that shit," a homeboy said. "But at home I don't mind it." San was fond enough of his mother, but he did whatever he pleased. I thought of a remark which a Manchester CBC had shruggingly made about Crips and Bloods: "It's really like a street thing. It's part of human nature. People being treated so badly out here, they wanna be in another family."

San was sitting outside now with his friends, his other family, gazing at the stairs which his ankle bracelet forbade him to descend. All of them had been born in refugee camps in Thailand whose names they didn't remember, or perhaps never knew. "Manchester's the number one place to kick it," they boasted; the Chamber of Commerce should have hired them! Apartment doors, half blocked by their bodies, gaped open into darkness, so that the evening coolness could enter; sometimes an old Cambodian lady, a little child or a kitten would pass close enough to the doorway to be seen; the boys paid no attention. "We live our lives by sellin' drugs, kickin' it, and havin' sex with girls we don't even know." Mostly, they lived their lives by kicking it, yawning, drinking, complaining—for instance, that they weren't old enough to drink a beer but they *were* old enough to be tried as adults for murder. Life wasn't fair, they said. And so they went on talking and joking, showing off their gold rings, gold chains, bullet wounds, waiting for nothing, while the beer bottles in their hands slowly darkened into silhouettes.

This was the life. Some people lived it more actively. Some lived it and got out of it. I remember a Manchester man who'd been disillusioned by the hollow heroism of gang fights. He'd been looking to be a tournament knight, a fair play warrior, but "Asian gangs, we don't fight one on one; we fight three on one." I remember another fellow who'd jumped himself out of CBC because "I don't have to be a gangster to do what I'm doing now. You just wanna be cool. In school, once I joined the gang I came from As to Bs to straight Fs..."

"Was there nothing good about it? Didn't it make you feel like a man?"

"Well, I felt like I was strong 'cause I had friends. It made me more of a man since people were more afraid of me. I remember one guy in my class who tried to fight with me, but then he learned I was kicking with a gang."

There was something to be said for that. Self-defense is an awfully comforting word. That was the siren song that the Kentfield Crips and the Original Crip Gangsters kept singing to that thirteen-year-old from Kentfield: "Jump in; we'll back you up. We'll help you and everything if any set comes to mess with you." And he was getting pretty tempted to jump in. Why not? Gangsters can be made as young as twelve...

Aside from protection of a sort (which of course came with the obligation to avenge injuries by and to people they'd never met), what else did the juniors get out of their new gangsterhood? The sense of belonging that their confused and uprooted families couldn't give them. Together they sat on the hot concrete steps of Kentfield, spitting, fashion-conscious, throwing out brand names. Together they sat in Manchester, badmouthing Kentfield. Lapsing in and out of Khmer, waiting outside while their homeboy lay hitting skin with some pretty hood rat, they extolled themselves and their neighborhoods until the sun melted them into sleepiness. — "I got jumped right here at 4402 Block," a gangster might say with immense pride. "I represent the 4404 Block now. But here, we're from the same set."

"Gangsters make the world go round," laughed a J.G. (junior gangster) in Kentfield. "What kinda job does a cop have? Eatin' doughnuts every day! My job is like a cop, but a *crooked* cop! Ridin' around, bustin' my enemies, *pop-pop* in your hood!"

I asked a Manchester homeboy why he'd decided to get jumped into CBC, and he said, "Just to fit in. Back in those days, seven-eight years ago, I didn't know nothin'. It was just to be cool. But now that I know, I keep on. I been through a lot with them. CBC is *nationwide*," he said with pride.¹⁷

"Why CBC instead of TRG or MLS?"

"It's the people you grow up with, you know."

"So what happens when you get jumped?"

"Just like it sounds. Everybody hits you for thirty seconds, but you fight back. They try not to hit you in face, 'cause you gonna be their brother, but I got hit in a face a couple times. When you want out of the gang, you get jumped for two minutes."

A longhaired Cambodian youth in Kentfield said: "I started kickin' with gang guys when I was in third grade. I got caught for smoking D" (dope), "put in juvenile for one month, then they put me here on ankle. I learned my lesson."

(What that lesson was I didn't ask. According to his homeboys, he still banged with them.)

"Why did you get jumped into OCG?" I asked another.

"Cause my homeboys need me. I been shot at more than twenty times."

"That OG, he's cool," said a little Cambodian boy beneath the glaring lights of

Kentfield at night. "He's my brother's uncle-in-law." And the old gangster (who might have been twenty) bought sweet beef satay from a street vendor and gave us each a stick of it. We sat there with him at a picnic table in the park. He and his girl and his gangster cronies were laughing and cursing. The girl was yelling, "*Hey, you queer!*"—and then a police car approached and they all fled into the darkness...

Boys who thought that the OGs weren't cool might have different experiences. Young N.C., who'd lived in Manchester all his life, was a little anxious about life because his sister had just been robbed. The thief came in through her second-story window at night while she lay in bed. Not caring about her presence in the slightest, he cleaned her out. N. was afraid he might come back. About the gangsters he said, "I think it's unsafe, 'cause they bother my brothers and stuff. Tell them to go steal, drink—and if they don't, they beat 'em up. They make 'em beat up other kids. Well, there's always pressure, like to smoke. First they give it to you free. There's a lot of dealing."

I would have been very surprised had N.C. become a gangster. Gangsters weren't studious like him. If they were intellectual, they suppressed that side of themselves or else employed it to spice up their sarcasms and safeguard their drug deals. The gangster mindset is necessarily rather closed. I am Red, so Blue is my enemy. Why? To the open mind, everything remains an open question. That attitude would be disloyal and even dangerous in the Crazy Brother Clan. And to an open mind, the Crazy Brother Clan might well seem like a ball and chain.

When I asked that tattooed Kentfield warrior Scarface, who'd obliterated his own gang tattoo within the maw of a tattooed tiger (and about whom San over in Manchester was quick to remark: "I fought with him a buncha times. I whip his ass every day, an' you can write that in"), what was the best thing about being a gangster, he replied, "Nothing cool. Just gotta do what you gotta do."

"So what made you join?"

"The first time, they ask me to go in since everybody planning to get jumped. So I jumped myself in. Like two or three years later, we started having a lot of enemies. Later on, there's no more fighting. There's only shooting."¹⁸

The older they got, the harder they got and the more dangerous it got. But they didn't know what else to do. Certainly they were no mainstream employer's dream. In one Manchester boy's caustic words, "They're payin' you for your skills—blow me good, baby! Six dollars an' fifty sense a fuckin' hour..."

"What kind of job do you want?" I asked a gangster.

"We just wanna kick back, waitin' for the money to come in." Earlier, he'd divided the human race into two camps: "It's either you sell drugs or you drug."¹⁹

Gremlin said, "I wanna be wearin' a suit." Another boy winked at the others and said: "I wants to go back to Cambodia an' open a strip joint!"—When I asked San where he saw himself twenty years from now, he smirked and said, "Under a park bench."

So they sat kicking it; they defended their colors. Gremlin said: “We used to kick back, smoke weed, hide from our parents, but now we’re grown up, so we can disrespect them if we want to and it’s not even disrespect. It’s just like all day we drink beer but we’re tryin’ to straighten out.” They boasted about how many times they’d been shot at. They more or less echoed the self-pitying junior gangster in Kentfield who whined, “You never know when the road gonna end.” They did what they had to do. —“An ABZ came over here from Oak Park with his wife and kid to eat something,” they told me (this was in Manchester). “He thought that would be cool. That’s how he came. You know how he left? In an *ambulance!*”

That was the punch line to many a story I heard in Kentfield and Manchester. It always brought the grins.

“What happened to his wife and kid?” I asked.

“Nothing. They were crying.”

“He died later that night,” said a boy with a smile.

“Oh, yes, he did die,” said the storyteller indifferently.

(One of the homeboys who were sitting there had recently been to Dallas, Texas, and returned home to the hood in a state of shock, because in Dallas, not only did both CBCs and ABZs wear different colors than in Stockton, but they *embraced* each other; they called each other “cuz”! —Did that make any difference in Stockton? —Not a bit. After all, that traveler had himself been jumped by five civic boosters of Oak Park because he claimed the black rag.)

That was what they did. They sat kicking it. Sometimes they got to hit some skin with girls (also known as *bitches*, *hos*, *chicks*, *bee zacks*—which could designate them either as bitches or as fine-lookers, *bed buddies* if they were regular sexual partners, *hood rats* if they were everybody’s partners, or *homey loverfriends* if they were desirable to the heart as well as to the groin). Allow me to quote Scarface’s dictum, uttered when I asked how easy it was for a gangster to get a girlfriend: “To get a decent girl’s more difficult, but to get a hood rat’s more cool.”

Gremlin’s loverfriend was Vietnamese. Being Cambodian, he was experiencing grave difficulties in getting her parents to love him, so he didn’t know how it would work out in the long run. But from the way he talked, I could tell that he was fond of her. San talked a little differently about his girl, Sara. Harsh teaser that he was, to her face he called her ugly, a hood rat, and on and on. He laughed about wanting to throw her out the window. Smiling, she gave almost as good as she got.

In Kentfield and Manchester, at least, it seemed that the gangs were primarily male. According to San, CBC had briefly entertained the auxiliary organization CSC — Crazy Sister Clan—but “they run their mouth too much, so we had a meeting and they said there’s no more CSC.” —“What did the girls say?” —“They can’t say *nothin’*,” he replied with a smile.

“Girls don’t have to wear their boyfriends’ colors, ’cause we believe in equality,” a Kentfield Crip told me pompously. “They’re free to wear whatever.”

"Know why?" laughed his homeboy. "Reason is, 'cause we don't care about the bitches! Your homegirls can come suck my nuts, 'cause they're all *equal!*"

If a girl was foolish enough to kick it with the full rainbow of colors, she began to run certain risks. In Manchester I heard the tale of a hood rat whose exogamous leanings had just recently prompted sanctions. "One of the homeys took a beer bottle and smashed her on the head," said a gangster approvingly. "See, she was kicking with ABZ. That was her mistake. She was kicking with two sets. She was a buster, man."

"So what happened?"

"Well, she got up and started to walk home, but halfway she fell down unconscious. So that bitch finished her trip in an *ambulance.*"

Sara (the only hood girl I got to interview; all the others declined that honor) respected the limits, although at first she'd insisted: "I kick with all kinds of sets. I don't care."

"Can you go to Oak Park?"

"Sure," the girl said.

"How come these guys can't go?"

"Cause guys are like—they're scared of going to Oak Park. Me, I go *everywhere.* I'm unique."

"Girls are more free," San put in. "Guys can't go nowhere."

"What's your opinion of gangs, Sara?"

"They're stupid. I just think they're stupid."

"Well, don't the gangs help protect the homeboys?"

"If I'm your friend, I'll be by your side no matter what. I don't need no gang."

"And you can wear any color?"

"I can go with any color I want, but I don't like blue."

"That's right," said San, delighted. After all, blue was the color of the Crips, whom he called "crabs." Blue was Kentfield color. Blue was Oak Park color, ABZ color.

"What's your favorite color?"

"Red," said Sara, and red-wearing San smiled complacently...

Sara's previous boyfriend had been shot dead on April 29th. "He wasn't a gangster; he just represent his hood."

"So what happened?"

"They come out and shoot him there, right in front of the friends he was kickin' with. ABZ killed him."

"How do you know?"

"Cause I do. I just do."

"Did you see it?"

"No, I was down the street. I heard the shots, but I didn't think anything of it, 'cause they always be shootin' the lightpost and stuff for fun."

"Have you been nearby when other murders happened?"

"Sure. In my neighborhood when I was young I was standing in my hallways and there were gunshots and somebody died, I dunno why."

"How did you feel?"

"I didn't really know nothin'," said the girl with an uncomfortable shrug. "'Cause it had nothin' to do with me."

That was more or less how she'd replied when I'd asked how she'd felt when her boyfriend was shot. Perhaps she'd had no feelings; perhaps she shut off her feelings or didn't know what they were; or perhaps she just didn't think her feelings were any of my business, especially since I'd had to ask her in a room full of boys. But the next day, when I raised the subject of her boyfriend's murder again, she said, "Now I'm scared 'cause I heard they're after me. This dude who kicks with them told his cousin and his cousin told me."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Sara. Can anybody protect you?"

"I don't think so."

Sighing then, she said: "My Mom always told me, you shouldn't have a lot of friends, and I always wondered why. Now I know."

That was the neighborhood rule. That was the point of the story I'd been told about the too cosmopolitan homegirl who'd finished her trip in an *ambulance*. That was one of the lessons of life.

As for San, when I asked whether he'd learned anything in life so far, he thought awhile on that long hot summer afternoon, with the fan going, the little television blatting, as he curled up on his four mattresses with Sara, and then he finally said, "Don't kick it in front of the street, 'cause if they see somebody in front of the street they do a driveby."

To me that didn't seem like very much to have learned, but maybe there wasn't much else to learn. If you spend your time kicking it and waiting for nothing, then you just might get nothing. "I don't really believe in nothing," said a gangster, the son of two devout Buddhists. "God is just like a figurehead of something you can look up to. You be a Christian, you be a gang member. If you think about it, everything is just bullshit."

I didn't waste my breath disagreeing. Should I have told him that he should make friends with anybody, no matter who wore what colors? Should I have implied that an executive job would soon come his way? Could I think of anything better for him to do than just kicking it? Why, that would have been as futile and foolhardy as wearing blue in Manchester.

I'M ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN YOUNG GIRLS (1993)

No story is anything more than a list, so we might as well begin with one. At the top of the list are the prostitutes who really love you, the ones who marry you for life or even just for a night but always with sincerity; the ones who sing after making love. Next come those who love the money, the vacations and the new clothes. They are honest about what they do, at least sometimes. Well-paid, professional though they are, they may become fond of you. If not, they will pretend that they are and have a good laugh later. Then there are the professionals who may not be quite as well-paid, the ones you order at the bar by number who say: I smoke you! and rush to gobble the penis down. They're the ones who say: Me no money. Papa Mama very poor! And if you ask them if they like this job they'll say softly: Me no like. But many will come to feel affection for you just the same; they can be made happy; and some are sex addicts who in any case would need to give what they're lucky enough to be able to sell. Below them come the Kong Toi girls laughing and singing: *I fuck you why, I door, know why...* You pick them out from behind glass in the dirty brothels that are lit up like Christmas; they don't bother to say much; they don't let you touch them; they spread their legs and then hurry away.

These are all voluntary prostitutes, although they may not like their profession

for its own sake; the same is true of most janitors, garbage men and clerk-typists. A little below them are the drug-addicted ladies of the American streets, who must trick, claw and extort; most have sad lives; many were started on their career by rape and incest; and yet they bear responsibility for what they do tonight and tomorrow; no one is "exploiting" them; perhaps they exploit themselves. For me they comprise the baseline of the tolerable. Below *them* begins the inferno of actual slavery. In the United States I think of the girls who work for pimps. Often their situation is not as bad as sensationalists would have you believe; sometimes it is worse. Street prostitutes, at least, have the chance to escape. Below them live (if you can call it that) the ones who are imprisoned. Some are simply locked inside. Others are chained to the wall. Not too long ago, one woman in Thailand's Ranong province managed to get away from her brothel. She ran to the city hall and begged someone to help her. No one did. A crew from the whorehouse came and beat her to death. For me the saddest phenomenon of all is forced child prostitution. Most of the time children don't have to be chained, only commanded.

This is the tale of how one child was rescued, and of failures, lessons, heroes and heroines along the way.¹

SASKAWA WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER, ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN, BANGKOK

Khunying Kanitta Vichaincharuan was well described by the cliché "a venerable old lady." One of the young girls at the Center told me that she was related to the King of Thailand himself, and that might well have been true, although I never dared to ask her such a personal question. She was a tall, whitehaired, immensely dignified soul who wanted to help others, but (like all of us) only in her own way. Many rigid people fail to do good because they alienate others. Khunying Kanitta, however, had had the means to create her own world in which people would do what she thought was best. It probably *was* best. With the one hundred and sixty-eight women and girls in her care she exercised the utmost gentleness. —Can you promise me? Can you promise me? I heard her saying to a woman whose European husband had beaten her and left her. —You must be patient. You must be patient now, because you have suffered for so many years. You must get all your things now, because he doesn't want you there. —With others she had less forbearance. She liked the photographer much better than me because the photographer never said anything.

But you have no right to do it! she cried in exasperation. You cannot do this! I have never heard of this! Two foreigners cannot simply go into the brothel and say: I want to buy a girl! Maybe the girl doesn't like you. Maybe the pimp tells her to pretend to go with you, then to run away.

Well, madam, I guess that would be our problem, I said. If we succeed in find-

ing a young girl who was forced into prostitution—

What do you mean, forced? said Khunying Kanitta severely. They are all forced. No woman wants to be a prostitute. Of course they do not like their job. Who could possibly like it?

I found it wiser not to say that in my opinion many did like it. I was asking for her assistance, not debating with her. I tried again: Madam, if we can find someone who was sold into prostitution against her will, may we bring her here or not?

That's a silly question, said Khunying Kanitta. That's quite absurd. Of course you may bring her here, as long as she's Thai. We will care for her. Thai girls we can help. Burmese girls we cannot help. The authorities will deport them.

Perhaps you could write a letter of introduction to the police chief in the town of S., I said.

I can do that. But afterward you must give me a written report, because I have helped you. And I cannot imagine how you can succeed in buying a girl. They sell girls only from one brothel to the other. Our girls are not for sale to foreigners!

Well, madam, I said, I guess if we can't buy a girl we can always kidnap one.

FROM BANGKOK TO THE TOWN OF S., RANONG PROVINCE

The clapboard walls of some television desert town were suspended above the bus while the rainy night serpented itself by, light ridden and neoned: a golden stupa lit up, construction cranes, a huge red neon squid; this was Bangkok. Under a wet concrete ceiling the streets became mirrors of darkness. We passed a row of cars under the overpass, a multicolored set of brothel lights, the Hotel 69, long grey coral reefs of buildings running toward Bua Thon. Later there was no rain and no city anymore, just massive trees and palms along the road like concretions of the night. We came into a town of low white houses with red-tile roofs. These houses mostly had open doorways that glowed with light, showing walls within like the inner chambers of seashells. There were puddles and potholes in the street, and a checkpoint of incandescent tubes where two police played cards in the darkness beside their car, lounging out of the light. A Buddha shone golden in a white niche at the side of the road. Eagerly now the trees joined the thickness of the night clouds, breathing green breath-puffs of the tropical night. Then suddenly there were palms and trunks rising straight and greyish-white in the darkness, and more checkpoints, many more, which daunted me. How would we bring a girl back through those? Later the rain began again and the palms glowed bloody brown in the lights of a town.

It was 5:30 in the morning. Within an hour, having established ourselves at the best hotel in town, we'd flagged down a motorcycle and told the driver: *Poo-ying*, which means: Girls.

A BROTHEL ACROSS FROM THE BUS STATION

Rain was flooding down on the roof. The girl in the black miniskirt, who'd come on a motorcycle at seven, sat, her face in her hands on the concrete floor, which was covered only with thin mats on which the weary whores had lain sleeping when the madam raised the steel shutter to let us in. Spiders twice as large as my hand scuttled up the dirty walls. The girls who still lay there covered their faces grumpily as they'd done when the cock crowed. I think they were all Thais. The madam had left the metal lips of this square cave agape. Outside, white sky-streaks of rain crowned roofs, and lakes were born in the muddy streets. The girl in black was the prettiest. She looked Chinese, so possibly she was from the north. The girl whom the madam had chosen for me, the fat girl, put on a cassette loudly so that the other girls now groaned and yawned and tickled each other while they smoked cigarettes. Slowly they began to dress. One whore swept the floor. A woman came in wearing a sop-ping smock. She stripped to her bra and panties, went out back, squatted beside the big tub of water, and soaped her vulva.

Patiently the fat girl awaited me. She was one of those girls with tattooed shoulders who smile, turn their faces and lives away, spread their legs and cry: Oi! when men thrust inside them, one of those girls who never ask to use condoms. She was unschooled and therefore probably doomed, but I had no reason to believe her a prisoner. At any rate, she would help cast me as a playboy. While the photographer followed on another motorcycle, I rode behind my new companion, noting the laughter of the Thais on the streets, gratified by the smiling thumbs-up of the hotel clerk. When the greatest number of people were looking my way, I put my hand in my pocket as if to pull out some money as I took her upstairs.

ACQUAINTANCES OF THE SUBAGENT

The photographer had a friend in Bangkok, a kind man always good for a beer or some T-Max developer, whose cousin lived in S. The cousin explained: Some of the Burmese come over here. They need the money. Some cannot work as house cleaners, so they do this.

Are there prostitutes who have been chained?

Before two months ago the police found one place. Now maybe finished. But if not, you will never know. Because when you see them, they smile. They are trained to do this. But after the customer, if you go in to them, maybe you see them so sad.

Are there young girls? Eight or nine years old?

Maybe ten. In Pattaya they have eight, nine year old boys.

A man came in, and the cousin said: He knows someone who is a subagent. He buy a girl. For Burmese. You a bachelor, you order, he bring a prostitute.

THE RESTAURANT GIRLS

The subagent drove his truck very stolidly. His face was freckled like a buckwheat pancake. The shell behind the cab contained two facing benches, in the style of a police van. This was also the configuration of the local buses, which were essentially group taxis that made pickups anywhere along their routes. I could easily imagine a dozen prostitutes sitting where we sat, being transported across the border or from brothel to brothel.

The cousin had advised us to disdain the first place or three that the subagent drove us to, to insist on young girls until we got our ten-year-old, whose age would automatically make her an involuntary prostitute as far as I was concerned, but this was still the first day, and I did not want to give the game away by moving too fast. It seemed best to appear spendthrift and careless, not demanding yet. We passed the steep jungle hills tickling the sky, long skinny bamboo stalks with alternating leaves, and then the subagent stopped at a restaurant. After a moment he came back. —No, he said. —He drove to another place where girls sat smiling at the concrete tables. Here he got out and sat quietly. His reddish scarred face was quite expressionless. No one said a word to him.

The slender young pimp, whom we'll call Mechai, spoke excellent English. He'd worked in the jungle cutting teak for awhile, but that was very strenuous and the money not so good, so he'd gone into the flower business. He told me that he'd started with only twenty thousand baht in capital.² His method was to go to Burma, find a likely young blossom, and ask her (or her parents) if she wanted to borrow some money—up to forty thousand. Then she could work it off. He assured me that he split the take sixty-forty with her. I almost believed him.

This place is not a prison, he said. Other places are prisons. The girls are free to go in and out until 6:00. They usually pay off their debts within a year.

That's nice.

I certainly hope you're not journalists, he said.

Journalists? I cried in amazement. We're just two guys looking for a good time. You can ask anyone at the hotel. I already did one girl today. We're especially interested in *young* girls.

Yes, said Mechai.

How young can you get them? I pursued.

Fifteen is as young as I go. Personally I don't believe in very young girls. And in fact right now all my girls are eighteen or over.

I winked. —Can you get us a fifteen-year-old?

I can go to the border and bring her tonight, but you must pay transportation. I can also sell you gems and opium at a very good price. And if you wish to rent a car, I can arrange it very smoothly for you.

But he did not look smooth. I worried that he might be getting afraid again. This slender gentleman, to whom, after all, we partly owe our success, needed foreplay.

Never mind the young stuff for now, I said. We'll take whatever you can offer us right now. Maybe we'll come back in a few days.

Very good, sir. You want to take this one? Very young, very pretty!

The girl was peering at me encouragingly. A fine gold chain set itself off against the blackness of her shirt. Pink lips parted in her reddish-yellow face and she smiled. Her black eyes shone. I nodded. Approaching me, she stroked her blue-black hair and caressed me with fishy breath.

What's her name?

Duza.

She is Burmese or Thai?

Burmese.

Oh, I see my friend has picked one, too. Very beautiful. What's *her* name?

Ko-Aye Aye.

How much?

Short time or all night? Mechai wanted to know.

Oh, we're just getting started in this town. Better make it short time.

Five hundred baht each girl, one hour time, sir.

How about three hundred for two hours? I proposed.

Okay, sir, never mind.

And do I tip?

That's up to you.

And so we took our girls back in the subagent's truck past the coconut palms twisting in the hot wet wind, emerald coconut-bunches rattling between the fronds. At the hotel I gave the subagent two hundred. I tried to get his phone number, but I couldn't explain to him what I was asking, so finally I gave up and we accompanied our ladybirds into the lobby where the bellboys smiled more mirthfully than ever, and I said to the receptionists in my broken Thai: You beautiful number one, you diamond, angel! and they giggled. We had a fine reputation now, should any whoremasters come seeking credit references. Upstairs we went, and after I gave Duza a big tip she wrote in Burmese characters: *Eko Duza chit e*. Duza loves her big brother.

MR. CHINA

The pastor of a certain Burmese church in the town was to become our ally in this enterprise. We met him also through the photographer's friend's cousin, who telephoned him for us. Formerly an officer in the Burmese army, he retained a soldier's dignity and directness in his new battle for the cause of God. We always called him Reverend (and I have to say that he was one of the few reverends I have ever liked), but for reasons which will become clear in due time we thought of him as Mr. China. After we had removed our shoes, I told him that we wished to speak with him pri-

vately, and his wife smiled and went away. He led us into the church office, then closed the door.

There are in this town two very bad men in this business, he said. One is ex-police. He was kicked out for having two shotguns. But this fellow is quite careful. After the recent arrests, he stop all his business. He's the owner of that big villa just outside of town. I heard he made a decision to switch to carwash. I think he already sent all his young girls to Burma. So that fellow is stop. But the other one, Pei³ X, he is not stop. Even today the Prime Minister is here and he is not stop it. Most of his girls, they've been sold, they've been kidnapped, they've been cheated. I never heard he gave any share of money at all to them.

And what about this Mechai?

Oh, if you went to that one you made a mistake. Most of the girls with him, they come willingly. But Pei X, I think almost all his girls is in prison, when they work for him.

We'd like to meet him.

It's hard to get in touch with him, said Mr. China. Although he's rarely there, he has three or four gunmen. So you must not trust anyone in this town! Maybe they don't do any harm to your life, but they do harm to your money. In the border town you can do everything.

If we can do everything, then maybe we can buy a young girl from him, Reverend.

I heard that Pei X never sell out any girl. About two and a half months ago, one girl ran away from his place and went with a Thai boy. Pei X got the power to ask the border police to check all the tour buses. The girl was arrested. He brought thirty thousand baht to buy her back to him. But they saw her crying and wouldn't give her back. Now she is happily mated in Burma.

He lit a cigarette.

Actually, I don't want you to get involved with these people, because they are good for nothing. They find out you make some trouble for them, they just kill you in this border. I heard a lot of girls die in this prostitute place, and they throw them in the sea. Again, I want you to put in mind that this is the border town. The police can do anything. They can kill you.

Where is this place? I said.

I have been there, but I do not know the house number. I can describe it to you exactly. It looks like an ordinary house, but to go inside you have a turn, to *here*, to *here*, and for *here* they have a room for prostitute and then *here* it is a dead wall, so even a man with a gun cannot escape. From the front they have a very thick iron door. Only when you knock do they open it. Please be careful. This Pei X, he can still stand up today, even against the Prime Minister!

THE FLOWER SHOP

The next day we set off to look for Pei X's business. The motorcycle raced past violet blossoms fluttering. The jungle hills far away were the hue of cigarette smoke. In the district where Pei X's flower shop was supposed to be we met an old Karen man from Burma with silver earrings and a gorgeous pipe he'd caned in the shape of two mating flies. He said by signs that he'd been shackled in a road gang, that he'd run away, that they'd shot at him. I knew that the Burmese government had been trying to crush the Karen for many years; in the international press there were stories of atrocities every year; and once the pastor said to me: Only when you are in Rangoon you can show off your stars of shining gold so nice. But only thirty minutes out of Rangoon it becomes very dangerous, because they hate so much the government! —It was not just the Karen who had been slaughtered; it was the Shan, and the students, and so many others. I wondered whether life in Burma was so unbearable for so many girls that they went to work for Pei X willingly—or were they all cheated, as the pastor had suggested?

Poo-ying? the old man laughed. He pointed upstairs.

He probably had some niece or daughter who would do what she had to do to eat. He was no Pei X. I did not want to see.

It was very hot. The afternoon smelled like a million licked postage stamps, and weeds swarmed balefully in hot puddles of rotten things.

Pei X's white villa was closed. We knocked and knocked, but no one came.

The photographer flagged down a motorcycle. —*Poo-ying*, I said to the driver. *Nong sao*. —Girls. Young girls.

The driver grinned. Then he took us to another flower shop. It was on the road away from the main town, the road going up into the cloudy hills. This one was perfect. It actually sold flowers. In its square cave the old proprietress flirted with me while her husband cut a bouquet of orchids. I said to her my usual *Sooy mak-mak*. *Petch tewee*. (Very beautiful. Diamond angel.) —She laughed and snatched my hand. This person was the madam of the brothel.

Sit down, please, her son said.

The photographer had to leave his cameras outside, and I my notebooks. The next time we came there I proposed that he construct a secret pinhole camera out of a cardboard box, which he did with his usual cunning. The film wind was a pencil, and the shutter a piece of tape which he could casually swing back from the pinhole. We wrapped it like a present (but the wrapping happened to be lightproof tape), and on a card-shaped slip of paper I copied the Burmese characters of my whore Duza: *Duza loves her big brother*. We taped a leafy twig beside this for ornamental effect. The photographer for his part had a brilliant suggestion for me, which was that I write my notes in postcards! Hardly anyone there could read English. If I sat on the bed, leering and chuckling with a couple of women beside me, the watchers would believe only that I was boasting of my rented conquests.

This time, however, the photographer was out of luck, and I almost so. In the money pouch I kept on my body I did have a tiny pad with a cover that said: DRAGONBALLZ: THE WORLD HAD CONQUERED THE EXTREME PLACE. I decided to pull it out when I was alone with one of the girls, teach her tic-tac-toe, scribble pictures in it with her, and take notes whenever no one was watching. That is just what I did.

The son led us around to the right. He unlocked a gate whose mesh was thick steel rods and swung it outward. There was a narrow corridor piled with cases of empty soft drinks; this extended behind the premises of the flower store and then swung left where we came into a courtyard; and after that came a second very heavy gate with a padlock on it. My heart began to cry out. The first gate was already locked behind us. The son fitted a key in the padlock, pulled the gate toward us, and pointed graciously. As soon as we had entered, he locked us in.

We were in a long wide concrete room without windows. It was hot and dark. A television faced the bars of that gate, talking and soothing and babbling.

Sit down, please, a man said.

There was a long bench where the girls had to be while they were being picked. One or two of them were already there, so pale, not looking at anything. The man disappeared for a moment. Then listlessly the other girls began to trickle in. There were about ten of them, and they seemed between sixteen and forty-five. They sat on the bench. There was one who bowed her head and one who smiled and one old one, one fat one, one beauty with a pale yellow face, part Chinese perhaps, whose eyes were so heartbreakingly vacant that I knew she was dead inside. The photographer decided to take her. I reasoned that the one who smiled might be a good companion for the other, that she'd be easier to communicate with because she was already reaching out to me, that her smile might be her way of screaming for help.

Our plan—how naive it was! was to take the girls to the hotel as we had Duza and Ko-Aye Aye, then fetch Mr. China over to interpret for us, and see if they were willing and ready to escape.

Girl no go, the man said. No hotel never. Always here. Danger police.

He gave us each a soft drink.

No, no danger when they're with *falangs*,⁴ I said easily.

The man stared into my eyes. He said: *Girl no go out never.*

Then the woman who had smiled took me to the first door on the left.

THE HOME OF THE SMILING GIRL

She lived and worked in a small hot pink cubicle with Burmese scrawled on the walls. The ceiling's tinny corrugations crinkled themselves onward past the partition's boundaries, into that room with the TV and the bench where the other girls waited. They could hear every noise we made. Her dresses hung on hangers on a rope stretched against the pitted wall. There was a canted spiderwebbed light-tube, and

a table on which stood cosmetics, detergent, and a plastic pack of condoms that looked sufficient for a whole regiment. The bed took up half the space of the room. It was a concrete ledge, waist-high, wide enough for two bodies, which ran from wall to windowless wall. On it lay a skinny mattress and a sheet. Each of the rooms along that hallway had the same built-in platform, as I later ascertained. It was difficult for me not to believe that the architect of this prison had known exactly what was being built. Just as German engineers' blueprints of gas chambers and crematoria damned them at Nuremberg, so these niches confirmed for me the nature of this sad place. What else could it be? A hotel, a series of slum apartments? But why no windows and no exit?

There was a hole in the door, and as I looked I saw an eye appear behind it.

The prostitute wrote politely: *I love and you I very love.*

Rain began to fall loudly on the roof. Perhaps they could not hear us anymore. I looked at the door and the eye was gone. At my request Mr. China had written in Burmese the words *do you want to escape?* and because he was concerned that Pei X might recognize his writing I then copied in my own hand those rounded m's and c's and sixes on the spot for him to pronounce legible. I'd wanted to bring this with me today, but the photographer had convinced me that the risk would be too great. If they found it, we'd be finished. So now instead I touched her shoulder, looked both ways, placed a finger to my lips, took her hand, and made a motion of running away together. She laughed gaily and shook her head. It had been hopeless, of course.

The eye was back. At once she took me to the toilet room, which was another concrete cubicle half filled by a hip-high reservoir of brownish-green water in which we washed with a plastic bowl, she always urgently whispering for a tip, making a motion of eating. I slipped her a thousand baht.

NEW FRIENDS

The photographer had returned to the hotel long before I did, since without his equipment he could not accomplish anything. As soon as he had left, the dead girl came into the smiling girl's room (and I wish that I had not called her the smiling girl because when the eye was not looking she did not smile very much, although she was definitely happier than her companion). It made my heart ache to look at her. She sat on our bed with us. Trying to get her to play tic-tac-toe, I put my pen in her hand, but she gazed through me and the pen fell through her limp fingers. When the rain stopped, I got up and went out.

The son gestured me to the street by a different set of angled passageways, walking behind me this time so that I remembered what the pastor had said about Pei X's twists and turns and gunmen; there was in fact one corner I had to turn where either the son or some hypothetical janitor of lives waiting ahead could have mopped me up. Nothing happened—why should it? I had been a generous cus-

tomers. The son drove me back to the hotel on his motorcycle for free. I liked him because he liked me and because in spite of everything, I believe that *I was just following orders* is sometimes a legitimate defense, especially in Asian families. His father had stayed out of everything, and seemed to me a weak character. I decided that his mother was the one not to like. His mother owned the prisoners inside.

MISS YHONE YHON

If we were to help the dead girl escape, we had to have another interpreter than the pastor, because we couldn't bring her to him beforehand, and thanks to his office he could hardly accompany us to a whorehouse. What we needed, then, was a woman who could speak Burmese and at least some English. This woman could come in as my wife. She could negotiate for my lovestruck friend to buy the dead girl. The photographer and I did not yet know that that was what we needed, but that was what we got at twilight while we ranged searching for pinhole camera components in the bazaar whose stands were covered with sheet metal which shone whitely with waxy lines of incandescence and yellow dribblets reflected from the light bulbs ripening beneath red umbrellas and from the roofs of other stands which steamed with noodles, faces, and the ice from Cokes. Sparks rocketed from woks that reeked of fish and burning. From a light-tube hung green hands whose skinny fingers were vegetable stalks.

Hello where you go I go you? said a Burmese lady in a dirty black dress patterned with orangish-blue flowers. Long parallel scratches scored her cheeks for health and luck. There were wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. She had a face like a stone Buddha, with a somewhat narrow chin which sloped evenly down from her mouth without a cleft, as I noticed for the first time when I painted her portrait. Everything about her seemed slender, fragile and busy like a mosquito. Her name was Miss Yhone Yhon.

Thai lady no good, she confided. She say give me money for one drink, I want beer, then she put pill in drink so you sleep long sleep wake up no more money.

Uh huh, said the photographer.

Burmese girl very good, she whispered.

Okay, okay, said the photographer to me wearily. Should we take her home?

How much have we spent on whores so far today?

Oh, not so much. Maybe a hundred bucks...

All right, Yhone Yhon, I said, you want to come home with us?

She put her hand in mine. —What your name?

Bill.

Okay Mistah Bia no pay money Yhone Yhon; Yhone Yhon no have money!

I guess that meant yes, the photographer sighed.

MISS YHONE YHON (CONTINUED)

She was a Shan girl, wild and free, who crossed borders without a passport, always singing, always chattering. She said: I sister five. Number one number two stay in Taiwan, number four she stay Japan, father mother they stay China. I stay here job.

What job is that, Yhone Yhon? I asked innocently.

She laughed and bit me in the stomach.

I remember her in the market, pecking at her bowl of sugar-flavored pea soup which we bought for her for about ten cents (she was always asking for money, and then spending it on Thai and Burmese junk food for us), ducking forward like a bird, singing while the rain fell like a wind and noodles of varying colors spun like yarn balls in the great woks. Rain streamed glowing silver and gold down slats and gratings. Yhone Yhon smiled and sang: I love you more can say!

She came to our hotel with all her possessions in a plastic bag. She was proof that prostitutes can be happy and enjoy what they do. She lived with us for many days, and without her we truly could never have accomplished what we finally did. I was not especially good to her. The whole time we stayed in S. the photographer and I were busy scheming to find and rescue somebody who needed us, and when we were not out we lay on our beds weak and irritable from the constant second-guessing, and so sometimes when Yhone Yhon thrust some new revolting food into my mouth I wouldn't force myself to eat every bite, and she'd be hurt; sometimes after she'd bitten me three or four times in a row with her sharp teeth I'd push her head away; when her birdsongs went on hour after hour I'd shush her so that I could think; she was exhausting, but she had a soul like one of those luminous triangles of fresh fruit slices. I will always love Yhone Yhon.

MISS YHONE YHON AND MR. CHINA

The pastor, who now visited us every night in the hotel to drink beer with his servant boy and smoke cigarettes, was a very learned man. One of the languages he spoke was Chinese. When Yhone Yhon learned this she was overjoyed and amazed. She could not speak Chinese, but she thought she could. Because she had forgotten the pastor's name, she always called him Mr. China; and that is what I will also call him from now on.

Mr. China for his part enjoyed her company immensely. One night the photographer was downstairs eating soup and I in my underwear was painting a nude of Yhone Yhon when he came knocking unexpectedly. At that time we did not know what an open-minded person he was, so I felt apprehensive that he might be affronted and withdraw then and there from helping us. He gaped only for a moment. Then he grinned. —Why hide yourself, you naughty girl? he chuckled, trying to pry away the towel in which she'd wrapped herself. I've seen many vaginas in my time!

Yhone Yhon squealed in delight. Then she bit his shoulder until he roared and kissed him on both cheeks. In the corner, Mr. China's boy, who was very shy, smiled a little bit, and I winked at him and bought everyone beers.

I have told my boy if he wants to marry he must wash himself more often! said Mr. China.

Yhone Yhon rushed to kiss the boy on the lips. He blushed, and she pinched him.

To Mr. China Yhone Yhon was always "the naughty girl" until the unfortunate day when, a little drunk, happily crunching on roasted watermelon seeds with her white teeth, she started teaching me Burmese; she'd make me say words that sounded like *what she saw, quitch she saw, down she saw* and when I repeated them back she'd shriek with laughter until she choked. She started getting me to recite this catechism after her on buses, and the Burmese passengers would laugh, too. One afternoon in the hotel restaurant when Mr. China, dressed in suit, tie and ministerial dignity because it was still working hours, dined with us, the photographer, who'd heard me say it many times, pronounced with a grin: *What she saw!* —A hush. Then: *WHAT DID YOU SAY?* shouted Mr. China. —It turned out that Yhone Yhon had been taught us variants of *eat my shit*. When Mr. China found out that she was the culprit, he demoted her to "the crazy girl." He harangued her for a long time on the importance of etiquette in public places. Yhone Yhon bowed contritely and moaned: Sorry, sorry! —As soon as he bent over his noodle soup again she grinned and whispered in my ear: *Down she saw!*

THE FLOWER SHOP

So when it was dark we took two motorcycles, my linguist of a wife and I on one, the photographer suitably alone and lovelorn on the other, passing shut gratings like immense silver waffles while trucks went glaring and honking past. A man in white was counting mounds of lichee nuts. Two curled dogs licked each other in a rectangular puddle of light before a storefront. Once our motorcycle slowed, and I saw inside an open restaurant: sepia-faded polaroids of the King on a calendar, peapods and chickens in an illuminated glass case stacked with cans of unrecognizable vegetables, little tables on the concrete floor, trays of eggs, sausages, frogs' legs, rice and squid stew, a little TV with a shrine above it, light-bulb-shaped pots on the wall; and I saw a man with both elbows on the table, eating beans. He turned his head. The waitress, carrying bowls of noodles and rice, laughed with white teeth. And I thought how much life there was in that crowded place, how many odd and beautiful there were in this world, and then I thought about the place where we were going. I had not been certain of finding it because when I'd asked for the address last time the old man had simply given me a single flower, but in the end the madam presented me with a card with a picture of a flower on it, and an address in Thai. Then she wanted *my* address. I'd written my full name and my telephone

number in the States, pleased to have been of service. The madam's son unlocked the first door, led us down the passageway and into the lifeless courtyard, unlocked the second door, and sealed us into that inner prison.

In that dreadful room the TV was spewing spurious life and the girls sat along the hot and dirty wall. —Hey! a pimp said. Michael Jackson! —The girls watched and waited, their faces the same color as the wall.

One lady in red leaned her face against her hand, lifting her upper lip in concentration as she watched the screen, her arm across her bare knee. Another sat staring, her fingers stirring restlessly. I remembered an insane man I once met in the Arctic who'd served many years in prison for rape. He taught me how jailbirds walk and move. The giveaway is movement without motion, a weary, lazy listlessness: nowhere to go, so no reason to move. These women were like that. One peered down at the floor, roundfaced, darkhaired. The dead girl had not raised her eyes since we'd come. My girl, the one who had smiled, saw me with Yhone Yhon and flicked a single neutral glance.

The grating opened. The madam stood in sandals, her face watchful, her grey hair tucked sharply behind her head.

At once the dead girl raised her head weakly, offering herself to the photographer should he want her, and the smiling girl was smiling at me again.

Thai ladies no good, whispered Yhone Yhon. She steal a money.

These ladies are Burmese like you, I said.

Madame Thai, she hissed. Madame no good.

I had to agree that the madam was probably no good.

Which one Mistah Ken want love love love? my wife said.

That one, I said, indicating the dead girl.

Yhone Yhon began to plead the photographer's case. The whores looked up from the television in amazement. Only the dead girl gazed straight ahead so despairingly.

Yhone Yhon pinched the photographer encouragingly and said: Your wife very nice very beautiful me speak I sistah she like you very much Mistah Ken.

Yeah, the photographer said. Yeah, I can see that.

First the madam wrote a five and four zeroes on a scrap of paper.

How much is that? said the photographer. Make a noise to distract 'em while I shoot off another frame.

Well, one thousand is forty, so five thousand is two hundred, so fifty thousand must be two grand, I said. Yhone Yhon, tell her fifty thousand is too much.

My wife began to plead and scold magnificently, her voice like a twanging rubber band, swaying her arms and fitting finger against finger, her gold earrings tossing while the whores sat watching and perhaps thinking that yes, every now and then it *was* possible to escape, and at last the madam (who'd been studying her with much as the same expression as one of those Thai bank clerks who wets a finger on a sponge, then dabs it across a banknote to see whether it is counterfeit), went down

to seven thousand, which sounded more reasonable to me. If it cost ten dollars to sleep with a woman once, then why should it cost more than three hundred to marry her and sleep with her for life?

It seemed almost settled. The madam urged the photographer to sleep in the brothel that night with his fiancée, and then in the morning someone could go get the girl's parents.

You think I should do it? the photographer said to me.

I wouldn't.

And Yhone Yhon whispered in my ear: She speak you stay here then she hit you you sleep sleep her brother come very quiet he hit you take money kill you no good. I hear her say brother already okay you hit Mistah Ken.

Tell her we'll come back tomorrow, I said.

At this the madam became querulous, and added another zero to her price. The dead girl looked as if she were crying, but she always looked that way and no tears ever came out.

AT THE BURMESE CHURCH

It's not very close, her parents, said Mr. China later, interpreting for Yhone Yhon. She was not sold by her parents. She was sold by another woman. She was cheated. The woman said she was going to find her a job.

Can you tell Yhone Yhon to bring the woman who sold her? Then we can find out how much that woman got.

Mr. China tuned the gold ring on his finger. —That crazy girl says next time maybe she not go with you because the man with the moustache follow you. I think maybe she's right. She says it's not very good for her to go there very often. So the old lady makes problems for her because she is illegal, too.

The Shan girl uncurled a long finger around another long finger and screwed up her face.

She said if you want to do, she go to Burma and take out Burmese officer from the militia to make sure she doesn't cheat. I say, get the girl for a low price, and make the parents promise never to do that again. Tell the woman who sold her that we are watching her. Otherwise with your money she get another five girls and sell them again.

How much?

Supposing you bring these officer, you must pay him Burmese money about three-four hundred baht... And you must pay Burmese immigration, MIS military intelligence... Three hundred apiece for all three branches. You visit his house and pay him there.

And the madam of the flower shop? How much should we pay her?

This old lady I know she is not so powerful in S. Pay her nothing. She's greedy. Seventy thousand baht, it's too much for one girl.

And you think we can let Yhone Yhon do our business in Burma by herself? She has no passport; she usually avoids the police...

Mr. China drank his beer irresolutely. Maybe you are right. She's such a good girl, you know! So goodhearted, but too simple! She don't know the danger. She tell everybody. Maybe they put her in jail. The political situation in Burma is very fishy right now. I think maybe you go without her.

THE BORDER GIRLS

We knew the way. Yhone Yhon had taken us to the border already—not yet to avoid the Burmese side, but close enough so that Thailand was flavored with Burmese alienness to an extent noticeable even in S. where there were so many Burmese anyhow (and most of them illegal, people said); everywhere I looked I'd see a little child with a shaved head and a brown face covered with white tanakha-paste; and the neighborhoods under corrugated awnings where sunken concrete sidewalks had been dyked against the streets and people sat in their doorways behind their neatly ranked sandals, there'd usually be both Thai and Burmese words written on the walls. Yellow and purple clothing hung from the windows. Women with gold rings and necklaces smiled nervously out. Yet Thailand was still Thailand whose long elliptical leaves hung down from ocher bamboo stalks which shot horizontally into space; Thailand's leaves therefore resembled drops of green rain; Burmese people grew here and there but Thailand was a wall of wet green bamboo-leaves over all, and hazy darkness greenish-grey. We left that almost behind that night in the open bus with its two long benches and the yellow flash of a Thai girl's cheek in the darkness which smelled like rotten sauerkraut, her hair darker than darkness; a boy's T-shirt, Yhone Yhon's hands interlaced on her knees, which shone reddish-yellow in the stream of tail-light flowing like sewage; suddenly we'd reached a wide dirt street of puddles and plank sidewalks like an Old West movie, sleeping dogs everywhere; as we got off the bus I saw a girl in a pale blue dress walking with a huge case of beer on her head. On the brightest part of the street where they were selling boot-leg dresses, smuggled Johnnie Walker, cassettes and panties and everything else, Yhone Yhon lifted up the T-shirt she'd cadged from me and tried on one of the bras for sale, singing happily: I love you more can say! And there were wide, bright cafes of dancing to Indonesian and African music where plastic flowers were crucified on the stained hot walls and smiling pigtailed Burmese girls swarmed around your table: waitresses in yellow with yellow wings, a lipsticked girl in blue who'd been sitting by the jukebox staring at the street. —I wish I had a hundred dicks! shouted the photographer. —These were the free and easy girls like Yhone Yhon. Doubtless many did not like their jobs, but they did not seem to be prisoners. A girl did my wife's hair while the other whores and plumpimps stood behind the chair, smiling almond-eyed, all so young and brown and small. When Yhone Yhon

was finished she bought a bottle of liquid speed like all the other girls who sat drinking liquid speed through straws and singing so happily along with the jukebox, dancing, swaying, none of them like the dead girl, the hot wind fluttering their dresses. Some sat in chairs that faced the wide plank-bordered street and they swung their legs restlessly, tapping bare heels against the legs of their chairs. A reddish-brown girl in a camouflage cap came in singing with a basket of bananas under each arm, from which the others snacked; then they hugged each other, tugged at each other, huddled around the jukebox arguing which song to play. Brown arms were reaching and playfully striking and caressing. But whenever a customer came in they rushed to pull out a chair for him, crying: My friend!

There came a gunburst of rain so that the Burmese fishermen who rolled in truckloads past that happy music must pull plastic bags over their shoulders, and then considerate Yhone Yhon, concerned about the photographer's disease of celibacy, offered to him the perfect girlfriend in golden sandals and tight black jeans with gold butterflies up and down her violet blouse. Only when she reached up to climb out of the bus (from which a small girl had just leaped with a huge basket of bok choy) did I see that her arms were scarred in sad ugly parallels, the reason for it which she gave by pointing to her heart, which she detonated with desperate motions; then she brought her fingers fireworking out of her eyes like tears and cupped an invisible beer can which she slammed again and again to her lips; after that the edge of her hand became a knife with which she sawed at her wrists.

Me no, said the Shan girl with a gentle smile, showing everyone her unblemished arms.

You must never tell her what you are about, warned Mr. China. This crazy girl, well, I like her, she has a good heart, but she is so simple, you know, that she will tell our secrets to everyone! And she does not realize the risk to her.

So this time when we set out to find the dead girl's owner we left Yhone Yhon at the hotel, watching TV with a happy frown of amazement, ready to smile at any instant, holding her breath at the most exciting parts, sitting so still that her gold earrings did not move. It was a video of two men fighting *ooo oh!* —Good-good Chinese! she cried.

But at the border, just past the moss-islands and white pits and red ants of a fat mango tree, the Thai police halted us and said we could not go. There was nothing for it but to bother Mr. China again.

Maybe we should pull out Khunying Kanitta's letter, said the photographer. She's a big shot; she must have some pull around here.

That's right, I'd forgotten all about that. What do you think, Reverend? Maybe the police *can* help us.

Maybe. You have a letter to the inspector? I know this Khunying Kanitta; she's very famous in Thailand. Why not? I think it's a good idea. But that Yhone Yhon must not come with you. If they catch her they put her in prison.

CENTRAL POLICE STATION OF S.

There was a boy in front of a desk with his police hat on it; he stared outside at other police with pistols and walkie-talkies but the boy had only an immense scarlet ledger under his arm. Beyond the grey bars behind him was darkness, but to his left, past police in dark green uniforms who sat on their desks talking on squawky telephones, was a flight of stairs which led to the air conditioned office where the inspector of interrogations was signing forms. Black and white xeroxes of Buddha dreamed under glass on *his* desk. He wore blue silver parachute wings, a silver star, so many other silver decorations on his dark uniform!

What is her name? he said, closing Khunying Kanitta's letter.

We told him.

Give address this flower shop.

We did.

Now she will get her punishment, he said triumphantly. You see, we have regulation.

The lieutenant signed the warrants and took them off.

We sat there thinking about the ten girls whose lives we had just ruined. We had not helped anyone.

This girl did not come to S. voluntarily, I said at last. She was sold against her will. Maybe it is the same with the other girls, too. We are not asking you to arrest anyone, officer. We only request that you authorize us to take this one girl past the checkpoints so that we can bring her to the women's center in Bangkok.

Yes, said the other cop, the young one. He glanced at the photographer's cameras. —I begin to study with photo, he said.

The rain began to spatter onto the windows of the police station, greyish-white bars of rain jailing the bamboo stalks. A calendar girl smiled beneath her straw hat.

So I guess we did a bad thing, I said.

I don't know good thing or bad thing.

We don't want this to happen, officer.

Especially for the prostitute case, they got to accept the discipline, the young cop said while the inspector of interrogations gazed moodily at Buddha.

What will happen to the girls? I said.

When I speak to the chief, I new for this area, the young cop said. I check the data. Soon in S. I can speak but now I do not know.

He was *very* new to the area, as I later discovered, because in conjunction with the Prime Minister's visit a squad from Special Branch in Bangkok had arrested more than a hundred Burmese girls in S. and returned them to their native government's tender care. After that, three lieutenant-colonels, one deputy criminal inspector, and one immigration chief had been transferred out of S. within twenty-four hours on charges of corruption. The young cop was the deputy criminal inspector's replacement. This was his first day.

We sat there, and my heart was like one of those half finished soups in a restaurant-cave, a bowl whose pale emerald depths are strangled by green stalks and dark leaves and white cross-slices of ineptitude as the young cop offered brightly: You want to take photo of the arrest? You can take from this window! —and we sat there, and I decided to telephone Mr. China. I remembered that once he had said to me: On Sunday, what the Burmese government call the insurgents, the Karen, they come to my church sometimes for services. The government will take that kind of idea with them. Actually we see them only as human beings. — I understood what he was trying to tell me. He could help us only so far. If we were careless he might be the one to get hurt. But this was an emergency. We had to drag him in.

Everyone stood up when he came, soaking wet in his suit and tie. He did not look at us.

I'm very sorry, Reverend, I said. Please help us recover from our mistake.

Never mind, he sighed.

Why can't they simply take that one girl and let us bring her to Bangkok?

Once they arrest one, they must arrest all, he said.

What about the old lady?

She gotta be arrested, too.

The young cop said something in Thai, and everyone waited while smoke curled down from Mr. China's mouth, and then Mr. China said: He do understand your kind heart, but this side, they must work by the law. You understand me, the police now are especially after all this prostitution case. The Prime Minister was here, as I told you. They try to clean up all the prostitution in S.

Can we bail the other girls out?

I think if you want to pay for all it's not an easy job.

Policemen kept coming in, soaking wet, and the inspector of interrogations told us to sign the first two-page handwritten statement which certified that we had been rendered every assistance by the police, and the photographer cried: I'm not signin' nothing! but I said: It's no use now.

The inspector of interrogations went out and came back again to give everyone the thumbs up. —They have arrived at the flower shop. Mr. China said. They begin their raid. Now we must pray that they do not find this place.

What are they saying now?

Police say when they arrest the girls they got to send them back to Burma as illegals. They get then prison for three years.

But what if they didn't cross the border willingly? What if they were all cheated and tricked like that girl we want to help? That doesn't matter?

No, said Mr. China. —All wet, he said, taking out his cigarettes.

I looked at the inspector of interrogations, at his calm face which nothing could change.

The younger cop seemed sad at what was being done. Or at least he had what is called sensitive eyes. He slowly turned the pages of a book of letters.

Here they come, said Mr. China.

Looking out the window we saw the green Datsun stop, saw the girls getting out, pigtailed Burmese girls, walking in sandaled single file into the police station. One was crying.

These illegal girls, they pay one thousand baht apiece, then—three years in Burmese prison, the young cop explained.

But the photographer had been scrutinizing the prisoners with his needling eyes that no one could ever fool, and he said: Those aren't our girls.

And a half hour later the leader of the search party came in dripping, and Mr. China and the inspector of interrogation smiled at one another quietly, and Mr. China said: They searched the place, but they found nothing.

Thank you, Reverend, I said. I fully understand what you've just done for us.

(Well, said the photographer in my ear, I guess that's the last time we go to the cops for help in this town.)

After that we had to sign the second handwritten statement saying that nothing had been or ever would be found and then we had to buy dinner in the hotel restaurant for Mr. China, for Mr. China's boy, which is to say his ugly boy who always sat with his hands clasped in his lap, his pale shirt of flowers sagging down his skinny shoulders; for Mr. China's beautiful student, for the inspector of interrogations, and for a dancer whom the inspector of interrogations knew well in every sense. We also bought Mr. China and the inspector of interrogations each a bottle of Johnnie Walker, and it was all worth it because they had saved us from doing evil. —The inspector says to tell you, police keep this matter top secret, Mr. China reported. The old lady never know you inform police. —As for poor Yhone Yhon, being an illegal, she had to wait in hiding in our room. —Police no good! She whispered. —Once I went up to check on her and she ducked and smiled and slurped her room-service soup. A snake of light uncoiled across her brownish-blackish hair. —You okay? I said. —She winked. —You have hand nose like lady same same one hundred percent! she teased me. —Thank you, honey. I'll go say that to the police —No, darling, police no good! —Downstairs, where red and green bubbles chased blue shadows across the walls, a longhaired hostess was holding the microphone, her face changing from pink to white; she wore a full length green and blue dress with many flowers (we had to buy her a plate of food, too, because she came to our table to visit the inspector of interrogations), and the inspector of interrogations was saying that he really would have rather gone into business than police work, although the salary was not bad; I gazed a little fearfully at his squat unsmiling face. Then he said something else, and Mr. China translated: That flower shop, you must not go back there. Too risky. The inspector says if something happen to you, the police spoil their name. If you get knocked on the head or something, it's very bad for you.

The Shan girl had the same advice. She thought that the photographer really wanted to marry the dead girl, and so she felt very sorry for him. —Forget her, Mistah Ken, she said. No good no good they kill you! They go chop-chop! Tonight me get you nice Burmese girlfriend Burmese wife no problem heart same same me! No go back frower shop never! Very dangerous! But, Yhone Yhon, we want to free that girl, I said. How can we leave her there now?

You *no* go! she screamed, weeping hysterically. No good! Police telephone me no good; they *no* like! You hit your head very dangerous please no go I sorry no go!

Okay, okay, I said. We won't go back there.

THE FLOWER SHOP

So the following afternoon while my darling wife (who sometimes walked around the hotel room naked under a towel, saying: You no shy? okay nevermind me shy shy shy) spent more of our money on presents for me and whiskey to get drunk on and presents for the photographer and new dresses with which to bedeck her pale and slender brown body and more presents for me and a T-shirt from the Since Club, Bangkok for me, and laundry for her, the photographer *and* me, to say nothing of weird foods for Mr. China and his boy just in case they might drop by, which they always did, the photographer and I set out in search of a motorcycle, but we were picked up instead by the owner of the hotel, who ferried us through a tan street's ocher puddles, passing a restaurant's cement cave where sausages hung like cut-off mummy fingers in a glass case behind four young Burmese men in bluejeans and sarongs who stood at the jukebox, picked a country western song, and began to whistle. The station wagon rounded a corner, and I saw a stand of flower garlands hung on ribbons. I thought vaguely about buying one for Yhone Yhon, but, as so often in life, already we were in a new place, where bright green cliffs of leaves were moated by a tea-colored creek; we bypassed castles of eggs and fruits, and then at last there lay ahead of us that familiar road that took us toward conical hills of jungle always overshadowed by clouds.

The madam's eyes were huge with hate. Her son said: Police say you English tell them!

Tell them what? I said innocently.

The madam curled her hands into fingernailed claws.

My friend comes to marry his wife, I said. Every night he cries for her. He waits for her Mama-Papa to come sell her. Where is his wife?

The son unlocked the righthand gate as always and led us through that hot dark passageway made narrower by cases of empty soft drinks, and when we came to the bend before the courtyard I thought: This is where we get knocked on the head. But there nothing happened, and in the courtyard nothing, and he unlocked that gloomy inner gate and gestured us in with an angry gesture and this time he did not lock it behind us.

The brothel was dark. The benches had been taken away, the television, everything. Its concrete hollowness reminded me of those abandoned missile silos on California that one can sneak into, hard and greasy and thudding with dull echoes. I opened the door of the room where the smiling girl had lived. The mattress was gone, the table, all her clothes; there had never been any smiling girl. I stood looking at the concrete platform where she and I had lain. It did not seem like a bed anymore.

The old lady had followed us. She hissed something, and the son translated: She say no girl have stayed here for many many year. This place finished long ago.

We went out. On the street lay the corpse of a giant black-speckled green snake whose whitish underbelly glowed in the twilight. Its mouth was tightly shut, reminding me of the madam's. I was glad that we had hurt her business.

YHONE YHON AND MR. CHINA

Mr. China lifted up my wife's shirt and squeezed her naked breasts. —She says, after you leave she will come to me, he laughed, but maybe now her mind is different because today she met my wife!

Dipping a watermelon slice in salt, slowly spooning rice and green things out of her bowl of broth, my wife smiled happily. She was having an exceptionally good time because I had agreed to go with her that afternoon to the Burmese market where girls tied tiny brown fishes into fans and there were stands of hanging bananas and warty green hot dog-shaped fruits; there she had spent every banknote I had on me; we'd had to beg two baht for bus fare from one of her friends by telling her that we had just gotten mated (on the way back, of course, she made me repeat after her: *What she saw, quitch she saw, down she saw!* and all the passengers chuckled at my stupidity); so now the hotel room was bulging and crawling with foods. Yhone Yhon loved nothing better than to be generous. Now she could stuff sweetened things into the mouth of Mr. China's boy every moment. —I love you more can say! she sang.

I assure you that the girls were not arrested, said Mr. China. Don't worry about that. If they arrest them then they arrest the madam, too. And if they ever get arrested my friends in police station will tell me.

So the madam paid them off and moved the girls?

You understand me! he said, smiling faintly. But we need not say so.

Why did the police say to us they wouldn't tell the madam we reported them, and then go ahead and tell her?

Maybe they didn't tell her, he said. Maybe she was bluffing.

The cops saw us come out of that place, said the photographer suddenly. You should have seen the looks on their faces! Man, they just ran for their radios!

I guess that means the inspector of interrogations will be mad, I said. Maybe he won't come for dinner. Another beer, Reverend? Why not?

Eat eat Mr. China eat please best food from Burmese market! said Yhone Yhon.

Every day at this market she talks about, they have the police and the immigration arresting these people, he said quietly. Every day. Sometimes it's so hard. And these poor girls—like Yhone Yhon—they take so many chances

Yhone Yhon suddenly lunged and bit his shoulder, giggling. —Aieeee! he cried, pushing her away.

I think there is so many girls that need your help, he went on. Because now there is two sisters, they've been forced into prostitution and they escape. But now they go in hiding because the owner tries to kill them. He's that bastard I told you about. (The Reverend hated to mention Pei X's name, even in private.) One of these girls is the lover of my young boy.

Tell us how it happened, I said.

That night they have quarrel and they try to slap each other—a real quarrel, mind you—so the owner rush inside to try to stop the quarrel and he forget to close the door. So six girls run out but he catch four. He send them to another district. The other two, if he catch them, it's almost a hundred percent that he kill them. So the two girls, they are in hiding. Not even my young boy can contact them.

I doubt we can find them either, then, I said. And I think for us to buy a girl from Pei X is hopeless. We can't even get inside there. And the flower shop is definitely hopeless now. Do you know anybody who might sell us a girl who hates her job—maybe an ugly girl who's not making him money?

I have one friend, he said. Tomorrow we go see him.

Okay darling you take shower, said the Shan girl. She gave me a bath, scrubbed me from head to toe, and gave me a shower, too.

Thank you, sweetheart, I said.

Okay never mind.

And then it was bedtime and she was praying to Buddha, kneeling on the bed with her long fingers clasped against her mouth, her eyes closed, chanting a long river of syllables. Then slowly she leaned forward and bowed herself all the way down to the pillow. She did this many times.

MR. CHINA'S FRIEND

The next morning we left Yhone Yhon dwelling inside her towel, drying her long brown hair. She was going to sneak to Burma and back today, she said. We told her not to get caught, and went downstairs.

The subagent who'd introduced us to Mechai and the restaurant girls had been waiting in the lobby. His complexion always reminded of the reddish blotches on the yellow face of a lichee-fruit. One of the receptionists had just paid him twenty baht to go away and I had to pay her back. He'd told her that he was our tour guide. Just as I came out I saw his truck puffing away and I did nothing to call him back.

I did not like him, and anyhow Mr. China already waited with the driver and the rented Datsun.

The photographer and I sat on benches in the back as we rode through the hot exhaust-ridden air. Trees like greenish-orange broccoli burst up from the sidewalk. Leaving downtown behind, the truck turned past two women sitting motionless on a heap of garbage beneath a tin roof, was swallowed by an alley, and made a right onto a high-walled street of mud puddles. A gate was swung for us, and we entered a courtyard.

The proprietor shook his head, sitting against the wall, smoking a Camel, clenching the side of the phony granite table.

He want to help, but he cannot speak out, Mr. China said. This is a border town, you know. Maybe he know some forced prostitutes, but he can do nothing—

A moustache hid the man's cautious brown face.

He says, now the business is closed down. This owner, we cannot embarrass him! It's up to him.

The man turned and called. A Burmese girl came slowly out, shading her eyes with her hand.

You see, she has a Thai boyfriend already, said Mr. China. She don't want to go back. You see, he's very good to his girls.

GHOST ISLAND

We were now going away from the tea-colored hills and rainy mountains, past emerald palm-flowers and walled leaf-fans, moldy thatched huts, then fish-stinking grasses and leaves. We drove until we reached the sea.

There was a long skinny pier, and across the hot brownish-green water I saw Burma, saw the humpbacked Burmese mountains with a pagoda between them like a vanilla Hershey's kiss.

Now the situation is very, very in tension, said the Reverend, pacing slowly. Before you have about thirty girls; now you keep only about five girls. By that order of the Prime Minister. So police are very afraid for their posts here. You see the owner must pay to the police maybe ten thousand baht per month.

The language of leaves babbled around us with a billion emerald tongues. I stood looking at Burma and thought: Now I know for sure that the girls in the flower shop weren't arrested. And I'm glad they weren't. We did hurt that madam, though. It must have cost her something to relocate the girls, I hope we hurt her.

You see that island out there? said Mr. China. We call that Ghost Island. Every now and then the police must arrest a few. Let's say the owner has ten girls. They tell him, okay, my friend, I must arrest three. For friendship's sake they put them on the boat to deport them back to Burma, but at Ghost Island they turn around...

THE RESTAURANT GIRLS

So we went back to the hotel (where Yhone Yhon, who had evidently not gone back to Burma after all, lay passed out on three-quarters of a bottle of Regency whiskey), paid the driver, thanked Mr. China and took him out to lunch.

We might as well leave this town, the photographer said. Seems like we blew our cover pretty, good.

You don't want to get mated anymore?

'Course I want to get married! But I only marry prisoners and sex slaves.

Well, we could try Mechai one more time, I said. I wouldn't mind slipping Duza five bucks anyway...

I don't care, he grumbled. I think it's pretty worthless, but if you want to try it then we can try it and then we can accomplish nothing and then we can leave.

Well, thanks, Ken, I was hoping you'd say that.

I was hoping you'd say that, Bill.

So we stopped a motorcycle and vibrated past great silver swinging cylinders of soup, and a woman's long black hair-creek bisected the emerald island of her back and shoulders as she bent over a pot of fish stew, and then sliding below those jungle mountains green-and blue-pastel-hazed, zigging between slow trucks covered with canvas, we came to the restaurant where the subagent had driven us ten days before.

I did not really describe this pleasure garden before, so permit me to lay down a few words in commemoration of our second and final visit. It existed beneath corrugated sheets, in a sunken patio of concrete. Last time there had been many whores sitting and smiling at the tables, but this time, perhaps because of the Prime Minister's visit, because of word spread by the madam of the flower shop, or simply because no subagent had called ahead for us, only one woman was sitting, and she got up and left. A girl in a yellow dress sat on a motorcycle, and a girl sat with two men on a bench, and on another bench two girls were sleeping facedown. Maybe it had simply been a long night. The girl got off the motorcycle and went inside without looking at us, into the black square cave with gold tinsel over where I had never been.

I now saw that Mechai was not the highest power of this realm, for on the bench closest to me an ancient woman in red lay sleeping. Since she was old she could not be a prostitute; so she must be the madam. And indeed she was. She raised one watchful eye at me, then went to sleep again, moving her bottom.

Mechai was sluggish. He said: I drink too much amphetamine. So I sleep only this morning ten o'clock. Now I must have my breakfast, sir.

I looked at his breakfast. It was a bowl of rice and more of the liquid speed.

No one there seemed to like us very much, so I took out my watercolors, took the drowsing madam as my model, and settled in for a nice long stay. Meanwhile, the photographer was negotiating quietly with Mechai. A moment later he came over. —Well, he said, they're going to rent us a young girl.

PARTICULARS ON THE BILL OF SALE

And *you* need no girl, sir? the pimp said.

That's mighty square of you, Mechai, but I have a Burmese wife already at the hotel.

Okay, never mind, he said agreeably.

How are you going to pick out the right girl for my friend? He's very particular about his girls, you know.

Yes, sir. Tonight I go to the island to buy from her family. I bring you girl, not too fat, not too thin, not too white, not too yellow.

Quite a few color choices you have to make, I said. Can you get him a green one?

Green? Ah, she will not be a virgin, he explained, but it will be her first time as a prostitute.

Where does she come from?

I must go into Burma to bring her. She lives in a small fishing village, you know. She has been only with six men. A nice fourteen-year-old girl. I must take a boat to fetch her, sir, so please pay my transportation, please.

(Like almost everything he said, this would prove to be a lie. Come to think of it, I guess almost everything we told him was a lie, too.)

DUZA

I don't have a prejudice against madams, I really don't. If they treat the girls well then they are probably doing more for them than their parents did. But all the madams I seemed to meet in S. had evil, unforgiving faces.

This one never smiled. She was awake now, and had retreated just inside her black cave to glare at me from her desk while the photographer was smiling at small children across the street and thereby causing them to scream. I think the police must have warned her about us. Mechai's business relationship with her I don't fully understand; the girl he was to bring us was supposedly from Burma, certainly not from here, as she told us later; and yet he worked here, had given us a discount on Duza and Ko-Aye Aye last time. Perhaps the madam would not have done business with us that first time if she had been there. In any event, she did not want to have anything to do with us now.

I greeted her and said: *Binai Duza?* Where is Duza?

Kin kao, said the madam shortly. She is eating rice.

Duza was at one of the tables in the patio, watching me.

I beckoned her over, and she shook her head quickly.

Doesn't she like me anymore? I asked the pimp.

Duza! he said.

She came immediately.

He said something to her and she shook her head again. —She don't mean it like that, sir, he said.

I kept making motions and asking for her until the madam called Mechai and Mechai went to her and then Duza came at once, laughing shyly with her laugh that reminded me of a Chinese woman I knew in California who had gone to Harvard Medical School; this woman was perhaps too full-figured for some tastes but I found her stunningly lovely. I had never been able to touch her because she was the friend of my girlfriend, and as a matter of fact she and my girlfriend and one other Asian girl had formed a virgins club; they would stay celibate until marriage and of course never ever get involved with white boys. The Chinese woman had hated me when I finally succeeded in making her friend fall in love with me, so she would not speak to me on the telephone or meet me, but over the years she'd begun to accept me; and I sometimes brought her presents—once a necklace of bullet-casings from Somalia, once an interesting rock from the Arctic, and now I loved her like a sister. Duza resembled her as much as those Burmese doubles resembled movie stars: Mr. China had told me how in his day subagents continually went upcountry to buy likely looking girls whom they established in bedrooms with framed posters of the cinema queens they resembled; so one gullible night when he was still in the army Mr. China and his best friend set out on their separate ways, and each paid a month's salary to be with a genuine movie star! —So we are so happy! he said laughing. But the next day we say: *You* slept with that actress? You lie, *I* slept with her! No, no, *you* lie; *I* slept with her! Then at last we realize how we were tricked, so we said: I slap my face; I'm a fool!

Seeing Duza, I could not stop thinking of this other proud and successful woman, and I said casually to the pimp: How long has she been working here?

About four months, sir.

Maybe I'll see her again next time I'm in Thailand. How much longer will she be here?

Until she has paid off her debt.

Remembering this as I stood face to face with Duza in the hallway beside the madam's desk. I bowed and clasped my hands as the Thais did in sign of greeting and respect, touched my heart, and beckoned her deeper into that gold-fringed darkness, trying to get out of the madam's sight with her I groped down a dirty narrow concrete corridor, feeling the doors of the side rooms where Duza and the others lived, and when I thought we were far enough I gave her a hundred baht. She smiled and ruffled my hair. I could not bear to look anymore into the eyes of this woman whom I was not going to free, and so I turned away to go out, but as I did I saw out of the side of my eye Duza holding out the banknote for the madam, holding it out with apprehensive eagerness so that she would not get into trouble, and I knew that Duza would not be keeping that money.

Perhaps it would be applied against her debt. —I love Duza, I said to the madam. —The madam yawned. —Duza is very beautiful, I said to the madam. —The madam opened a book of names and numbers and wrote down a 100. —You

are no good and I am no good, I said to the madam. Same same. —I went to the photographer and we left. As we rode away, I saw Duza smiling and waving cheerfully to me from the doorway.

YHONE YHON

My hunch was that Mechai might actually bring us a young girl, and if he did then we'd almost certainly be leaving that wet green jungle town very quickly without Yhone Yhon because she was illegal and there were so many checkpoints ahead, so I wanted to do something to take care of her a little. It was to be a surprise, which was why she protested being snatched away from her current junk food, a doughnutlike thing resembling a mushroom cap in shape; I'd seen how they deep-fried the yellow dough on sticks in a pot of oil; at any rate, I was ruthless, and so we motorcycled to one of those places where gold chains of intricately stamped stars, flowers, heart links and chevrons accompanied chunks of good glowing gold in illuminated cases against red velvet; and her eyes began to glisten eagerly. My ladyfriends always seem to appreciate gold, perhaps the Asian ones even more because they tend to be very practical and so they have no scruples about selling it.

The bored Thai lady behind the counter wore a diamond necklace, a diamond ring, and a thick gold bracelet. She inspected Yhone Yhon without liking.

You can buy whatever you want for a thousand baht, I told my wife. She swarmed voraciously through that shop, picking through gold rings in grooves of red velvet, giggling with the other gold-ogling girls, one of whom held four immense peapods under one brown arm while the other stretched itself out on the counter beside Yhone Yhon's, which had already piled up chunks and ingots of gold until the bill was 4750, so we compromised on a ring and some earrings for twenty-five hundred.

She fixed her eyes on me shrewdly. —After I bought it your Thai money finish? she said.

Pretty close.

This one no good, she said on the way home. Malaysia gold good. Singapore gold good. Thai gold no good.

Yeah, I said, well, I guess you've had a lot of experience.

The photographer was lying on the bed doing receipts and said:

Well, Bill, you spent \$106.00 on your girl so far today... and Yhone Yhon turned and swiped at his crotch.

YHONE YHON

Across the street, fragrant balls of color hung above a grating clammed shut for the night, and a piebald dog drank from a puddle of soup.

While the photographer waited in the parking lot to meet his future spouse and Mr. China was at the church on standby alert I sat watching Yhone Yhon lie not quite smiling in her sleep, her new golden earrings still in, her dark hair a stain on the pillow. There was a little twisted black thing that she prayed with sometimes, squeezing it between her fingers; she held it now, and her hands lay on her thighs.

At last she stirred and looked at me. Whenever she bit me I used to put my hand down her pants; then she'd grimace, laughing: *Aiee!*, and rest her head on my thigh; I could tell when she was about to bite me, so I'd get my hands ready. Today she was not like that. As soon as she opened her eyes she knew that I was going to go.

You can't come to Bangkok, I said. I wish you could come, but you can't. Too many checkpoints.

She understood, and embraced me, weeping: Police no good! I speak they no good I no like Burmese pay money! Burmese men job here no pay police get hit on head! Maybe same same me! Police no good!

Here is as good a place as any to mention that Yhone Yhon had been getting telephone threats from the police every day while we were gone—if they were in fact the police, and not, as Mr. China hypothesized, the people at the flower shop, whom he called “the other side.” The town of S. was definitely getting hot. We had defied the inspector of interrogations and he had caught us, we seriously inconvenienced one business, and were plotting to steal from another. It was an excellent time to make our adieux to the place.

Listen, Yhone Yhon, I said. Here's two hundred dollars. I want you to cross the border and take the bus to Rangoon. You understand?

Yes.

S. is dangerous for you now. Many many police. You come to Rangoon and we will help you there. How many days for you by bus?

Maybe three days.

Okay. You meet us in Rangoon in one week, on Monday night. What hotel?

She named one, and gave me her Burmese identification number.³

Good. You promise me you'll meet us there?

Okay darling you want me I come same same you no problem I love you stay with you. You pay Yhone Yhon money in Rangoon?

Yes, honey, I'll give you some money then.

No problem me wait you Monday Hotel P. Yangon.

Just then the photographer came bursting in. For the second time in the ten years I'd known him (the first was when he was raided by the FBI) he looked shaken. —Jeez, she's a *young* one! he breathed. Never seen one that young! I'm afraid to bring her up and maybe get busted.

I thought for a minute. —Okay, I said. Why don't you pay Mechai in the parking lot—

I already did, he said gleefully. And guess what? I got the idiot to write me a fucking *receipt!*

Well, then have Mechai tell her the number of the room. Then you come up and she can follow.

Call China! Call China! Tell him to get his ass over here fast!

I telephoned the church and said: Reverend, we got one.

Okay, he said, I'll be there in twenty minutes.

YHONE YHON AND SUKANJA

The girl sat on the chair in dirty pajamas and answered that she was fifteen. During the weeks that we knew her we had her age variously as sixteen, fifteen and fourteen. After a while we gave up asking. She looked twelve. She looked so scared that I wondered how she would ever trust us. The answer, of course, was that she never would. Had it not been for Yhone Yhon, who immediately set out to make her feel at home by bestowing upon her embraces and junk food, I am positive that we could not in a billion years have gotten her to agree to go with us.

Yhone Yhon's first reaction on beholding the brown prostitute was: Your wife very sweet very nice very beautiful Mistah Ken.

Haven't I heard that someplace before? he said.

Tell her we don't have sex with her, I said.

The child relaxed slightly.

Tell her we will never ever hit her or beat her.

She sat with her hands between her knees and tilted her head.

Her head was always tilted. Her hair swooped down to cover one eye. Maybe she did not really want to see much of the world.

She say she no like her job, said the Shan girl.

Mechai says her father and mother live in a fishing village in Burma. Ask her if that is true.

She say father mother stay in north of Thailand.

Does her father work?

She's a father mother job, one day job, one day eat finished. She say father no house. They sell her to buy house. This job she no like.

Her father sold her?

Uncle. Sister brother. I say her you want this job? She say only to eat. She no like this job. But she like you very much Mistah Ken very good wife no problem she no like.

Tell her not to be afraid of us. Tell her we want to help her and also her father.

She speak they watch her talk foreigner. Tomorrow she speak she afraid to stay job here.

Mr. China and the boy now made their entrance. Usually when they came Yhone

Yhon would run up to Mr. China and grab at him playfully, saying: Hello my darling—oh I sorry I forgot I mean Mr. China! —This time she rose, but did not let go of the young girl's hand.

Reverend, I said, we need you to interpret for us and we need Yhone Yhon to put her at her ease.

Mr. China sat down beside her and looked into her face. Watching, I saw the kind authority that flowed from him into the child, saw her begin to believe in him.

He said something to her, listened to her reply and laughed. —Her parents never teach her Burmese. She is almost a Thai. I don't know. Maybe she is not Burmese at all.

We paid two thousand baht for her, plus expenses. How much will be credited against her debt?

She get a hundred forty baht, said Mr. China.

When the girl answered questions, she hung her head and clasped her hands.

She says she was sold for 11,500 baht by her uncle since her father didn't have a place to stay, he said. They build a small hut with the money. It's almost sure, if her parents take her back, they sell her again, get a new money.

Then maybe we won't bring her back to her parents. You told me before that just a few days ago three prostitutes escaped to Bangkok...

He looked at me. —If she run away and is caught back, she get a very hard beating. And if she isn't caught, do her parents get punished?

She said if her parents don't owe too much, it's okay. If not then maybe there's some problem.

The girl was squeezing Yhone Yhon's hand very hard. Yhon's arm was around her.

She said, if the parents tell her to come back to work, come back. It's up to the parents.

Well, Reverend, maybe it should be up to us.

I had wondered whether I would feel any desire for such a young girl. As I gazed upon her in the skimpy pajama-dress that showed her dirty brown knees, I found that I had in me only pity and determination to protect her.

Let's leave her and Yhone Yhon alone for while, I said.

YHONE YHON

Outside the hotel there was a wedding party under the new awning and across the street the disco glowed Christmasy with strings of radioactive limes and oranges. Mr. China had told me that it was an ungodly place, that girls went home with you there for no money. One of the hotel's busboys was carrying two bottles of soda in each hand.

We sat in the restaurant for half an hour and drank beer. Then I told them to wait.

Coming in as quietly as I could so as not to disturb the child, I found her sitting up praying. I remembered the way that Yhone Yhon had prayed in a long

earnest whisper, lying in bed next to me in the darkness, because she was about to have intercourse during her period; and the next night she prayed for a different reason; she always gave me a reason until I understood that she simply always prayed, a quarter-hour rivering of soft low words that made her one with the sleek brass of Buddhas I was to find in the arched niches of Rangoon's pagodas, some almost cruel, a little like Tutenkhamen's deathmask, but Yhone Yhon was never cruel and when she singsonged her mantra in the hotel room she expressed the serenest fervency of any human being. Our little girl (whose name, Yhone Yhon said, was Sukanja),⁶ did not pray like that. She was simply terrified. She prayed like someone who was about to jump off a bridge. Yhone Yhon was sitting beside her, and I saw how tightly she squeezed Yhone Yhon's hand. This to me was one of the most irrefutable proofs of Yhone Yhon's goodness, that this weak, abused creature should trust her.

Hello darling you same same lady one hundred percent.

Well, thank you very much, I said. If I am a lady then you must pay me.

She tittered. Yhone Yhon, ask her if she wants to come with us tonight.

She says okay.

MECHAI

Mechai had agreed that the photographer could have the child until 6:00 a.m., so we had Yhone Yhon call a taxi to Bangkok for 5:00. Mr. China had said that taxis would not have any trouble at the checkpoints. Buses were the most dangerous.

Shortly after midnight the phone rang.

Please, sir, this is Mechai. I must take the girl away for half an hour. Her mother have got picked up by the police. We must take her down to explain.

Since Sukanja had already told us that her mother was far away in the north, I was not especially impressed. —Where are you? I said.

In the lobby.

I'll be down shortly, I said.

I hung up the phone and told my friends to stay with the girl. Then I took a five hundred baht note from my money pouch and folded it into my left hand.

We went out to the parking lot together, and he stood gulping nervously. He was a small fish, not quite as cunning as we were, and I already felt sorry for him. The photographer had told me that some police had seen us as we left Duza's restaurant and that they'd stopped dead. Most likely they had gone to the madam after Mechai had already left to get the child, so he had just now discovered that we were traitors. That was my theory, anyway.

A bellboy from the hotel stood behind us, trying to hear what we were saying, so I led the pimp deeper into the shadows.

Where is she? he said, sweating.

I put my hand on his shoulder. —I must explain something to you, I began solemnly. My friend has just now begun with the girl. She didn't like him at first

so he had to beat her a little. You see, whenever my friend sees a young girl, he falls in love with her. And whenever he falls in love he grows very, very violent. I fear for myself and especially for you if we take the girl away now. He's like a crocodile, you know, who's taken the first bite. I think he finished tying her to the bed only five minutes ago...

But it's very important! cried Mechai. I'm not trying to cheat you. I'll give you all your money back!

This was an amazing offer for a pimp to make, so I knew that he was truly scared.

I presented him with the five hundred baht note. —This is to smooth things over with Sukanja's mother and the police, I said. If they don't need it you can give it back.

But—

I will speak with my friend. He's very dangerous. I hope maybe I can get the girl back to you in two hours.

Okay, okay. —He got into his pickup truck and rushed off.

He had been very nice and fair with me, and now I felt even sorer for him.

MR. CHINA

Yhone Yhon had rescheduled the taxi. It was supposed to come in fifteen minutes, and it never came. Every half hour I went down to the parking lot to see if Mechai was back yet, each time passing the receptionists and telling them that they were diamond angel number one. They laughed as much as they always did. Seeing the photographer go upstairs followed by the child did not seem to have diminished their smiles in the least.

At 1:10, Yhone Yhon went out to find a driver, and she did not come back. The child lay wide-eyed in my bed while the rest of us sat trying not to disturb her. I had given her a sleeping pill, which had made her drowsy, but the coming and going that we had to do, no matter how quietly we tried to accomplish it, prevented her from getting any rest. Her face became every more tormented and agitated, although she never moved or said anything. For my part, I felt a hideous nausea as the time passed. The photographer paced, muttering: Where's that fucking taxi? — Mr. China had gone downstairs after bidding us goodbye. It was important that he not be a part of this, he'd said, and I knew that he was thinking of Pei X. He said that he and the boy would wait for us in the lobby to help us in an emergency but we must pretend not to know them from now on. He took the photographer's hand and my hand and prayed with us both. We gave him a hundred dollars for his church, and another hundred to settle our bill for us because we did not want to risk having Mechai see us checking out. Then he and the boy were gone, and I felt lonelier than ever.

At 1:30 I went down to the parking lot again, passing our two friends in the

lobby with no sign of recognition, as they had wished, but Mr. China followed me outside. He whispered to me: I think you should waste no more time.

I agree. I agree very much! But we have no vehicle.

Yes, he sighed. Yhone Yhon is a silly girl. I fear for her.

What should we do if Mechai comes back? I said.

You want me to arrest him? Mr. China said. I can do that.

I thought. —Let me talk with him first. I will tell him who we are and invite him to come with us. If he takes us to Bangkok I will pay him well. If he refuses, then you can arrest him.

He nodded. —The taxi is not coming, he said after awhile. It's too late.

Can we rent a vehicle?

From where?

Maybe from the owner. Can you ask him? He's your friend.

I cannot, said Mr. China. You must ask.

THE OWNER

The grand master of our hotel, the one who had chauffeured us to the flower shop on our third and final visit, was sitting fuzzily in the restaurant where we had entertained the inspector of interrogations, and he was surrounded by girls and beer cans. The wedding celebration had almost reached its close. When I put the question to him, he looked at his watch in amazement. —It's too late, he said.

Soon they'll come take this girl away! I shouted. When they come, they'll ask her what happened; she's not clever; she'll tell them we tried to take her away, and then they'll punish her!

Okay, he said. I will find you a car, and I knew that he never would. He lifted the next slow spoonful of rice into his mouth. —After I finish eating.

I bowed and clasped my hands together. —*Kap kum kap*. Thank you very much.

YHONE YHON

Then Yhone Yhon was running toward me in the darkness of the parking lot and a pickup truck was coming behind her and Yhone Yhon was calling: okay hurry okay!

I ran upstairs where the photographer sat in darkness with the girl. We grabbed our bags, lifted her out of bed, helped her put her sandals on, and I took her by the hand and began to run down the hall. The photographer was already ahead of us. I stopped, went back, opened the door to the room, and turned the light on to slow Mechai down in case he went there. Then I locked the door behind us.

We came running down the stairs and the receptionists' mouths were open and I saw all the motorcycle drivers who had taken us to whorehouses now rising to their feet but I did not look at their faces, and the photographer was already in the cab

and I put the girl in beside him, shut the door, and jumped into the back. Yhone Yhon dashed to me and wanted some more money for the motorcycle that had taken her to the driver. I gave her a thousand baht. —Run away! I told her. They're coming back in twenty minutes; run away, run—run—run!

The truck pulled away. I saw her getting smaller, and that was the last I ever saw of her.

When the photographer and I got to Burma, we went to the hotel she had told us of and asked for her every day. I am hopeful and confident that nothing happened to her in S., because when we called Mr. China from Bangkok he said that he'd seen her leave the hotel safely. I think that maybe she didn't come because she thought that my money was finished, or perhaps because after all she had done I'd forgotten to embrace her one last time...

S. TO BANGKOK

The sour-fresh smell of the jungle was like bile. Trees massed in complex darknesses very distinct against the hazy moon. They were slender black stalks of night with leaf-pagodas mushrooming out as that wan moon pursued the truck around humid bends. I thought about all the checkpoints ahead, and because I had no plan I stopped thinking about them. The photographer might have had a plan but although he was only a window-thickness away I could not communicate with him. He would have to handle them. They would either be porous or they would be impossible. I saw mist in tobacco-smoke layers halfway up dark mountains, and headlights glowed far away like sickening foggy sunrises on a methane planet. In the cab, the girl's head was on the photographer's shoulder. That made me happy, that she could sleep a little. Suddenly the night reeked of fish. My inner heaviness came from never knowing if the next car would be the pimp's. The supposition was that if he were to follow us at all he would go back to the brothel and get helpers, maybe gunmen, to come grinding after us through the cricket-shrieking night. But there was no way of knowing what to expect. I am not very good at worrying about what I cannot help, and so I was alert but calm. The planning and the second-guessing was over. Now there was nothing left to do but act.

After the first hour of those windy roads, the little girl began to throw up. We stopped and cleaned her off a little with leaves. Then I lifted her into the back of the truck with me where there was more fresh air. I touched her hand and told her that she was number one, but she only sat on my duffel bag, staring at the scuttering trees with her elbows on her knees, her T-shirt like a pale white moth of sadness. Gradually the night began to smell more like hide glue, and the stars grew brighter. She vomited again and again and I held her icy hand.

It seemed to me that a car was following us, and I tried to pull her down onto the truckbed where she would not be so conspicuous, but she resisted with all her

puny strength, and I realized that this girl who had not even developed breasts yet must think I was trying to rape her. The photographer later said that I should have dragged her out of sight no matter what she thought, and he was probably right, but I just could not bring myself to do it. So I sat there with my arm around her as she shivered and spewed more puke with little half-digested grains of rice in it, and I squeezed her hand but she did not return the pressure. We stayed like that, mile after mile up that sinister road, until the blue dawn when palm trees stood like dead fans in the unfiltered exhaust stream and we sped past houses like square white bells of light.

At 6:00 or 7:00 we had to stop again for her to relieve herself, and then we put her in the cab of the truck again because we were coming to so many checkpoints. —How far you go? cried the driver. —Bangkok. —Bangkok! How much you pay me? —Two thousand.⁷ —How about two thousand five hundred? he said —Okay. —How about three thousand? he pursued. —Okay, the photographer began to say, but I kicked him and said no. —Okay, okay, said the driver. At the next gas station the driver bought a bottle of liquid speed and chugged it down while the photographer cried: You are driver number one! and the driver laughed cheerily. Then we jumped into the truck and sped northward again, I lying in the back worrying about checkpoints. Every time we came into the raking lights I'd pull the hood of my camouflage raincoat over my face and lie low. At one triangle of incandescent tubes we were stopped for perhaps ten minutes and I heard the police talking with the driver and their flashlights shone through my hood. I prepared for the worst. We were kidnapers. There was a very good chance that we would go to prison. We were still in Ranong Province, perhaps close enough to that nest of snakes in the town of S. to receive some poisonous bite. I did not dare move. Finally the police were looking at me, and so I threw back my hood, sat up, and saluted them as cheerily as I could. They laughed, saluted me back, and went their way. Presently the truck began to move again. Later the photographer told me that the driver had had no license, so had argued with the police for awhile but that was all.

In the strengthening daylight an hour or two later we stopped at a gas station, and she went to the toilet. I waited for her. When she came out I bowed to her and she threw her arm desperately around my waist.

Pei, I said. Big brother.

She nodded.

She shook her head to everything else, every offer of water or chewing gum or anything. She was the saddest little girl that I had ever seen.

In the rushing truck she woke up, pushed her hair back, folded her arms and fell asleep again.

BANGKOK

At half past nine in the steamy morning we were close enough to the city to get locked in traffic, and I bought a Buddhist garland from one of the vendors who walked between the smoking vehicles (they sold them everywhere in S.; for Yhone Yhon's prayers I'd always been meaning to buy one of the ones with gardenias on the bottom for tassels, then a chain of pale white blossoms, then a red ribbon and more white blossoms, topped by a colored bow and a long bright ribbon of a different color; but in the end I had never gotten around to it) and then I handed it in to her through the left hand window. She hung it reflexively on the mirror. I hoped that doing that might have momentarily comforted her.

The driver refused to go any further, and I did not blame him. We transferred to a taxi. The young girl fell asleep beside me in the back seat, her plump little hands clasped in her lap, her knees apart, her head hanging down from her slumped shoulders.

The nurse at the Center was later to tell me: She say she like S. better, because here too many people.

A TELEPHONE CALL TO S.

Hey there, Mechai, old buddy, said the photographer, how's tricks?

What happened? cried the pimp. Ken, where's the girl?

She's in a safehouse now. You can tell her mother that everything's okay. The girl will contact her soon. Here, I think Bill wants to say hello to you.

So you were journalists after all, he said to me reproachfully.

Yes, we were, I said. But I promise not to use your real name or even mention S. in my story. I like you fine. Please forgive me. She did not like her job and wanted to come with us. We'll be taking care of her now.

If you had asked me, he said in a low voice, I would have arranged for you in a smoother way.

Well, maybe so, I said, not believing him. Do you have any message for her?

I know this girl does not want to stay here, and I cannot help her, he said. Please say to her that I am very happy for her and wish her a good life.

Will your colleagues try to kill us?

Now I am sure they will not do anything to you, because they do not have big power. They are very afraid. Every girl place in S. is closed.

Well, how about *that*, I said, mighty pleased with myself. I told the photographer and he whooped. Poor Mechai was silent.

And how about Duza? I said.

This Thai girl, she does not belong to our staff.

But, Mechai, you sold her to me once!

Yes, she is on our staff.

And Duza is a Burmese name.

Yes, she is Burmese.

How much is her debt? Maybe I can buy her if she wants to stop being a prostitute.

I don't know her debt, sir. I find out for you. But I think maybe they move her soon to another location.

SASKAWA WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER

So you telephoned the pimp? said Khunying Kanitta.

Oh, yes, I reported, he said he wishes her every happiness.

She made a mouth of disgust.

Sukanja sat shyly in her chair in the new dress that the Center had given her, with her hands in her lap. The old lady began questioning her.

There are about forty in that brothel, she said. We will report it to the police inspector.

The girl always clasped her fingers tightly in her lap and bowed her head when spoken to.

She would like to learn to sew. But first we must send her to the hospital, to have her health checked.

Ask her if there's anything we can do for her right now.

She says, she wants to see her friend. Her friend is a waitress in Surat Thani.

A prostitute?

Yes. She wants to be with her. It is quite unrealistic, of course. She is not realistic. She cannot go out of this safehouse now. Otherwise she may be kidnapped back again.

What else does she say?

She says that at the very end of each month the owner of the business checks your debt in a special book, to see how much money you've made. But often when you go with a customer they don't write it in your book. And the girls, most of them, they cannot read, so you see, it's very cruel. She says her idea is that she'd like to clear her debt. That is why maybe we work with the police.

She turned to the girl again. Upon me the old lady generally turned her icy hair and piercing eyes, but this other fragile young soul she seemed to warm gently with the breath of compassion. —Did you know that she had been in three places? First they took her to S. where she was working for two weeks, then Surat Thani about three weeks, then back to S. for a month. In her place, the youngest is thirteen years old. And this pimp you telephoned, she said they heard he is HIV. He used to slap the girls, too. Did he slap her? Well, he never slap her. He was always nice to her. Maybe she was a good worker.

I know you hate the pimp, I said. He's done some bad things, but I don't believe he's a bad person. Why isn't there a Center to help people like him?

Well, she conceded, I suppose he is afraid for his life, too. Because he will be hurt if he does not take the boss's side.

So the girls say that he has HIV? How do they know that?

Oh, they do not know anything. It is just a word for them.

Does Sukanja know what AIDS is?

She just now know, because our social worker explained it to her. Tomorrow she will be tested for HIV.

ANOTHER TELEPHONE CALL TO S.

Well, sir, soon I will be in very big trouble with the girl's owner when I cannot return her in two-three days, said the pimp. I must leave town very soon. Maybe I go to the South and become a tour guide.

Mechai, I'd really like to help you: How much do you need?

Well, sir, I cannot ask for anything. It's up to you...

Retrospect proved Mechai to have been the perfect victim. We'd called Mr. China, and he'd said that he and the boy remained in the hotel lobby for an hour after we fled and no one came in. Mechai must have been too scared. But we had had no way of knowing that until we had acted.

And Duza's debt? I said. I would like to give you some money for Duza...

I do not know, sir. I think already they move her away; I think she is maybe gone...

DON MUANG POLICE STATION, BANGKOK

She took my hand and smiled at me the next morning on our way to the police station where she sat in her new white blouse and blue skirt on the waiting bench, her lips parted as she watched the junglegreened policeman lean back scratching his nose at a woman who gesticulated and begged.

What does Sukanja think of this place? I asked the nurse.

She said she always thinking so much, she afraid.

The policeman was saying to the woman: If he raped you, why didn't you cry out? Because he closed my mouth.

But someone else was there?

Yes.

And he heard nothing?

The woman hung her head.

The policeman smiled a little, put his arms behind his head, and then they brought the accused rapist in.

Maybe this woman she no speak true, said the nurse.

Sukanja sat miserable and silent.

At last they brought her to the police desk where a young man in civilian clothes interviewed her gently as the nurse sat nodding.

Do you believe that the owner has hidden the other girls now? he asked her.

She inclined and lowered her head.

When it came the photographer's and my turn we told the cop what we had done and he gave us the thumbs-up. But Sukanja sat with her feet out of her sandals, gripping her chair.

The cop took her thumb and rolled it on the stamp pad to make a signature.

Can you read, Sukanja? I asked.

She smiled proudly. —A little bit, said the nurse.

Again she nodded, pumpkin-seed-eyed, as the boy leaned across the desk, taking laborious notes on a folded square of newsprint.

SASKAWA WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER

I like American music very much, said the nurse.

And Sukanja?

The nurse laughed. —She don't like any songs anymore.

BANGKOK

At a table in an alley of umbrellas and loudspeakers that met a street of cameras, frying pans and oranges, the nurse ordered ice cream with corn kernels in it and Sukanja shook her head, but the nurse pushed it in front of her anyway, and the girl took two bites. After a while she ate the rest. Quietly the nurse caressed her arm.

CENTRAL POLICE STATION, BANGKOK

Inside the long dirty corridor one wall of which was bricked with cement hexagons that gave egress to bell-sounds and tuk-tuk exhaust and traffic noise, there was a desk where after waiting another hour I had put a police helmet on, and then I put the helmet on the nurse and the policeman shook his finger and shouted so I had to bow and clasped my hands. Past this desk was the room where the policeman sat with silver stars on his shoulders, red rope braid, a diamond ring, a gold ring, a gold bracelet. Lighting a cigarette beneath the no smoking sign, the policeman slid a form with the arms of Thailand on it into his manual typewriter.

Did she tell you she wanted to go with you? he asked.

Yes, officer, I said. She said she didn't like her job.

Okay, the policeman said. Curling his lower lip, he pecked at the typewriter with great panache, using one finger of each hand just like me. Another young cop

in plain clothes came in, unchambered a round from his pistol, popped the magazine into a drawer, and took an aspirin. The blackish-silver keys flew lazily up.

The policeman laughed to her: I *believe* you don't like your job. Maybe you have no feeling for sex, because you are so shy.

After it was over, I said to the nurse: Please tell her again that she is our little sister now.

But this statement, which I had meant merely as a reassurance, must have been taken by Sukanja as evidence of some new manacle of obligation, because she only lowered her head even more and the nurse said: She say, I promised you I will not go for prostitute.

SASKAWA WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER

Khunying Kanitta had once told the nurse not to wear gold because that would be showing off. The nurse idolized her, was herself ascetic, had left her family's rich home in the south to help others. There was a nunnish atmosphere about the Center. It was a clean place of white buildings, trees, lily ponds and good works. Across from the nurse's clinic, a pavilion graced the water, and close by stood Khunying Kanitta's residence small and cozy where the barefooted maidservant stood picking leaves and gazing over the rearing head of a life-sized wooden horse and stroking the cat which lay beside a basket of bananas, while Khunying Kanitta sat inside, in a room of angled glass blinds and polished wood, green drapes tucked back in pig-tails, and her young girls sitting respectfully around her. —*Kap, kap, kap, kap kum kaa*, the old lady said rapidly on the phone. She was speaking with the police about Sukanja. Every now and then she looked at me with disfavor where I sat waiting just outside the doorway. She could never make up her mind to trust or like me, perhaps because I never disparaged Mechai, or perhaps Sukanja had told her that I had been involved with Yhone Yhon; her common response to anything I asked was: That's a silly question. —But slowly I came to trust *her* because whenever a woman would come to her with troubles she'd invite her in, listen to her, speak with her so kindly: Your husband doesn't care where you live. He doesn't care where you go. I have to tell you about how he feels. But he cares about your son. Don't you think it's better to stay here? —The woman was sobbing. —If he wants a divorce with you he must provide you with some money, Khunying Kanitta went on quietly. Do you feel better to know this? We can give you a shelter. No one can hurt you here.

And so by the time Sukanja had been at the Center for two weeks and more, I knew that the right thing had been done—not that *she* told us so; in fact she'd began to avoid both the photographer and me whenever she could, bowing her head quickly and scuttling away. This hurt our feelings a little, because we believed that we had proven ourselves when we stole her away on that wet and itchy night whose

dangers wriggled like a lichee-fruit's swarming root-hairs. —Frankly, she does not consider you as friends, said Khunying Kanitta. She cannot speak with you, and so she feels very awkward with you. —After all, I thought, she must not have good memories of men. Around the other girls, at least, she'd started chattering and laughing. I had certainly never heard her laugh in S. Every night the nurse counseled her and hugged her. Every morning at 5:30 she rushed to wake the nurse up for her duties, clinging to her hand.

SUKANJA AND D.

The name of the nurse was D., and in her way she had as rich a heart as Yhone Yhon. Unlike Yhone Yhon, she could talk to other Thais like a man. In the South she was the only woman who was the head of a village. She was not as good an interpreter as Mr. China had been, but she was what we had and the child loved her.

Sukanja came running downstairs in her new white laundress uniform. When she saw us she hung her head. We gave her the gifts we'd brought back from Burma—a necklace of prayer beads, a wallet with twenty baht in it, a little cup—and she flinched away.

D. said that the previous day she had been crying because another girl had told her that she should go back to her family, and Khunying Kanitta had then explained to her why it was dangerous for her to do that.

Ask her if she's okay here, I said.

An almost imperceptible nod.

And her sister, any danger she will be sold?

No problem; she has boyfriend.

Does she want her sister to visit?

Yes.

Her mother?

No.

Her father?

No. She have telephone number.

We want to meet him. I want to give him some money, and then I want to tell him I will kill him if he sells his daughter again.

Okay, D. said. Please go to the head of me. Please come to my Khunying.

KHUNYING KANITTA

So you go north, said the old lady, a little more cordially than usual. (We had just paid her eight hundred dollars for the child's education and board.) —D. can come with you, but you must pay her way because we have no budget for this. We would

like the father's signature for payment of Sukanja's debt. From the town of C. the police will accompany you.

Yes, ma'am, I said.

NORTHERN THAILAND, NEAR THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

The police sat reading newspapers in the porch above the river. One said that you could see Laos on the other side of the river and the other said that you couldn't. When D. delivered Khunying Kanitta's letter they rose, went out and returned passing the envelope from hand to hand.

In the north, if they have a daughter they can take big money, said D., her words round and distinct like the bare brown toes that she took from her sandals at night. If you want to help all of them, give them some job in the village. It's so difficult to change this style. They want television, they sell her—it's so stupid!

Is this problem very common here? I said.

They all shook their heads. I was happy to see that the mentality involved in covering one's ass is the same all over the world.

Ask them what we can do in general to help them with this problem.

They all laughed.

Just now they do something, said the nurse. Maybe they change government. Because some corruption.

The cops were sitting at a desk in front of a cage with a lock on it. No one was inside the cage. A lazy peck of a manual typewriter came from behind it, and every two or three minutes the zing of the carriage return.

The cops studied the letter some more. At last one of them drew a map.

He say, you know, in the Sukanja's area, in the borderline, most of the family come from China. Most of them are lazy, a lot of them smoke marijuana, no job. Police say, what can police do? And then first the government can do. So they are lazy, smoke marijuana, sell their daughters.

That's nice, I said.

He said, Sukanja house is so dense forest, if rainy we cannot go.

Ask them if we have seen them in a police thriller movie.

The nurse laughed. —Crazy you!

SUKANJA'S VILLAGE

In the back of the black pickup was a decal that said: POLICE: ORDER TO KILL. We sped down the hot green-sided road of tall grass, sugarcane and palm trees, passing skinny shirtless cyclists. The pale blue mountains grew bigger. The air smelled like tart pineapple juice with occasional hints of manure. After a few kilometers the dirt road became just a track between plantains. An old lady crossed it slowly, bearing a

tall basket of sugarcanes on her back. Continuing past the tall sugarcanes and rice plants, winding among the wide hills of nettles, corn and tall trees, we passed a water buffalo sunk in soupy muck up to its eyes. Alongside a field of dead corn we experienced a little of the water buffalo's life, for the truck sank to its axles in the reddish-brown mud, and it took us much rocking and pushing to get it out. The second time it happened, we had to jump into the mud and pack the wheels with dry cornstalks. The policeman who came with us took off his gun and shiny boots in order to push. That time it took an hour, another truck and several people from the nearby fields to free us.

At last we came into the village of hedges and thatch-huts and peering skinny-legged Chinese-looking children in dirty shirts who rubbed their crewcut heads and smiled softly. The cop jumped out, his white T-shirt immaculate, his pistol back in his belt, and strode to a cyclist, who pointed.

Beside a T in the dirt road with a red-and-white striped pole half canted to make a lazy checkpoint, the hard dirt began to rise, and on this slope was a corrugated-roofed building of whitewashed cement outside of which the soldiers sat at a splintery table, one leaning dreamily over a manual typewriter, another very slowly copying names into each hand drawn copy of a village map, writing each family of characters so neatly and slowly inside its house-box.

This army come to help the people here, said D., who always chose her English words in much the same way as a roadside cook, whose every motion is slow, thoughtful, the ladle slowly rising, the reddish fingers weaving chills in among the rice. —He is rescue army to help, have some school for the child, stop opium. We talk together, since I am head of village and lady police. And I want to phone them to keep in contact, to tell them not to sell their daughters.

You said these people are all Chinese?

Some from the China, and some from the Burma. Before, this area was a Red area. Closed. Some fighting. Some Communists from Laos. But now it's okay. It open about six years ago. Mostly the people here used to be soldiers for Chiang Kai-Shek. After Mao take power by revolution they come here. And they send them money every year from Taiwan. If you are Chinese soldier and you stop, every year money from Taiwan. Maybe Taiwan take care of all of them.

Looking through the doorway of the station I saw a large map. —Where is this place, exactly? I said.

When D. asked in Thai, the soldiers only shook their heads. —Maybe is top secret, she said.

Okay, okay, she said after awhile. Now we find father Sukanja.

Borrowing a jeep and one of the soldiers, we continued on among the tall unmoving trees and steep roofs of grass, our green horizon bristling with leaves and insects, and the nurse said: Maybe we don't give money for send the owner in S., because maybe dangerous.

Many of the houses now had red-bordered vertical signs on them painted in golden Chinese characters. Bamboo fences guarded them. The more ostentatious ones had open cement porches like Duza's restaurant back in S. Huge sheets of canvas lay on the dirt road; on these, corn kernels were drying. We passed a concrete house whose patio was piled with many ears of corn; in its dark doorway stood a young girl beside her father, who wore a sarong. The father's hand almost touched the Chinese characters on paper glued to the sliding door.

We had to walk now, up a bamboo-walled dirt path of houses. It was not far to Sukanja's home.

SUKANJA'S FATHER

It was a hut, just as Mr. China had said, and outside some strips of dog-flesh were drying from one bamboo pole, and a few faded clothes with holes in them hung from the other. Inside, the floor was concrete with a couple of mats laid down for furniture, and all the walls papered with newspapers. A few fresh leaves and flowers reposed in dented vessels on a low piece of wood. They were Buddhists, then. There was an electric clock and there was a small television.

Oh, a television, said D. I thought he was poor.

The father was skinny and middle-aged. He twitched his mouth a little, squatting on a mat, answering questions in a rapid and surprisingly deep voice. I had expected him to be meeker in the presence of the police and soldiers, who now demanded his identification to see if he might be receiving support from Taiwan, in which case the sale of Sukanja would look worse. But he had nothing to show them.

In the doorway the cop wagged a finger at the father, who in turn shook his head indignantly. He pulled out an album, and there was Sukanja in a family photo, looking happy and more pretty than I'd seen her.

Long tattoos were lettered in double rows down his skinny tendoned arms. His long fingers clasped his toes. —*Kap*, he'd agree every now and then. *Kap*.

Well, I said, what's *his* excuse?

Wait, said D. Okay. The police tell him, why you sell daughter to go prostitute? He say last the Sukanja work in restaurant for one thousand baht, so so poor. Him thirteen years here. Before that, in borderline in Burma. She think maybe she can get a better job. Her father is Chinese, no ID card, so he can never go to any town—and Sukanja don't know the way. So his son-in-law send her in the prostitute, bring back money, get ten thousand baht for himself, send father three thousand baht. Right now the son-in-law is go down to S. to get more money from her owner.

So you think it's true? I said.

Yes, I think. He say, son-in-law come visit and ask, where is Sukanja? Because now she run away.

Ask him, what is your opinion of your son-in-law?

The man swallowed. —He say, he doesn't know about Sukanja prostitute job.

Well, he knows now. Is he angry at his son-in-law for selling his daughter?

He is not angry at him. Because stupid thinking. He says prostitute no problem. Any job that get money is no problem.

Ask him, does he want Sukanja's sister to be a prostitute?

Up to her. If she want good money, no problem.

Ask him, was it up to Sukanja?

He shrugged.

Ask him if he knows what AIDS is.

The man shook his head.

You tell him about AIDS, I said. Tell him maybe Sukanja has AIDS.

D. spoke to him for awhile. Then she said: He so sad but he doesn't know anything.

Where is Sukanja's sister now?

One have boyfriend, sleep together boy no problem not yet married. She call him husband. The other one we don't know. Maybe is prostitute job.

The boyfriend is the one who sold Sukanja?

Yes.

Oh, well that's pleasant, I said. Here's three hundred dollars. Can you get him to sign a receipt for his daughter?

He can't read or write.

An X will do, then.

Kap, said the man, clasping his hands and bowing slightly.

I tell him to buy some pig, start a small business, said D. And I tell him I will be telephoning to him, to see what he does.

I looked over this man who had nothing and was nothing. He did not seem to be a bad person. Hardly anybody ever is. I gave him another hundred, wondering if he had any chance or whether it was too late. Most likely, I supposed, the son-in-law would take it all from him.

SUKANJA

And that is almost the end of the story of the story of Sukanja. Her HIV test was done, and she tested negative. On our return to Bangkok we learned that the "uncle" who'd originally sold her to the brothel in S. had come to the Center in our absence to persuade her to return home. Khunying Kanitta assured the child that she did not have to leave if she did not want to. When the "uncle" protested, Khunying faced him down. I delight to imagine the iron grimness with which that lady met him. He complained of his expenses in coming and she gave him three hundred baht and sent him away. As for Sukanja herself, on our last day in Bangkok the photographer and I had hoped to take her and D. to a movie or whatever she might fancy, but when she saw us coming she ran away, and D. said: She no want to

go outside with you. I don't know why. Maybe she afraid.

CHIANG RAI

One more story, about two full-lipped ladies side by side on my bed, with gold earrings, shy smiles and clean shiny toes. It had been easy. When the tuk-tuk pulled up, I'd said: *Poo-ying. Nong Sao.* —Girls. Young girls.

His face sad and disgusted, the old man drove a short distance. A younger entrepreneur stood up at the side of the road. —You like young girls? he said smiling. I have many. Small small?

Yes, please.

Fourteen-fifteen okay?

Sure.

The tuk-tuk turned down a dark narrow side street and then there was a gate. I wondered how many thousands of places like this there were in the world. A man slid it open for the tuk-tuk and then closed it behind us. The courtyard was very dark. Inside there was another barred gate which they opened for us. The light shone on eleven very young girls sitting with crossed knees at the end of the short corridor, watching TV. The photographer and I picked out the two saddest.

Will you sleep with me without a condom? I said.

If you pay a lot of money, D. interpreted.

How much for a Thai?

Five hundred. You pay 2500 for two girls. Very cheap since you took from their center.

Ask them if they go with many *falang*. Number one is Japan, second is China, third with falang. Thai people cannot go.

Why?

Cannot. Too much money.

Do you like your job?

Like so much. A lot of money.

How much money?

We don't know. Owner has not given us, all three months we work there.

Smiling in embarrassment, one whore hugged her legs and the other wrung fingers aimlessly.

Tell them we're giving them the opportunity to do something else if they want to.

They never see money because maybe the owner never give them, D. said. It's so sad.

So do they want to come with us?

No way. Never. They very very happy this job. She is like the Sukanja father, no brain thinking. In her village so much come to this job because it's so poor. Many

many come normally here.

Okay, I said. Let's drop it.

Why? said the photographer.

Because we're not missionaries. D., stop arguing with them. Tell them thank you very much. They're welcome to sleep here if they want.

They prefer to go back to work, she said.

OPIUM AND INSURGENCY

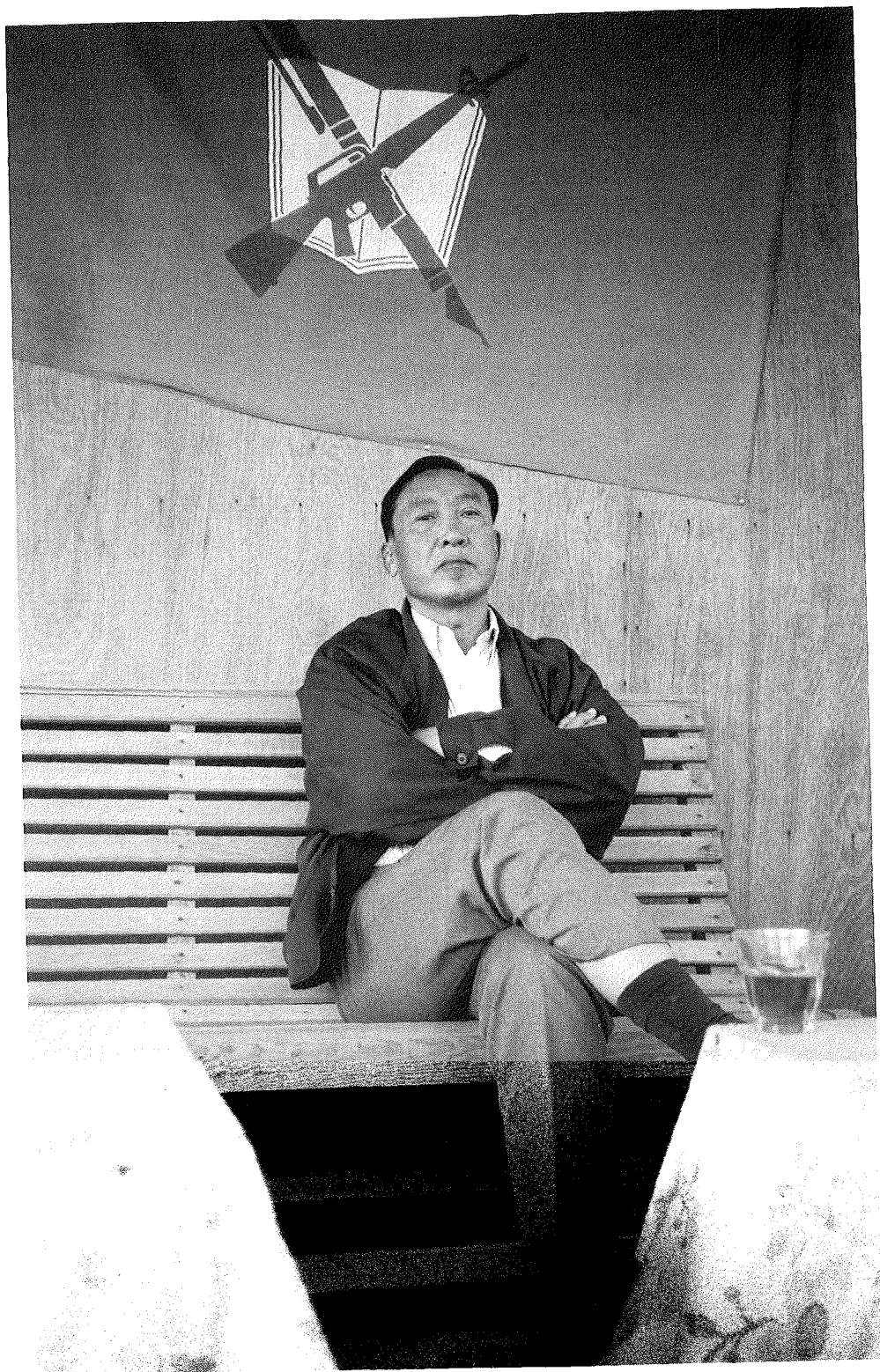
SHAN STATE AND KERENNI STATE

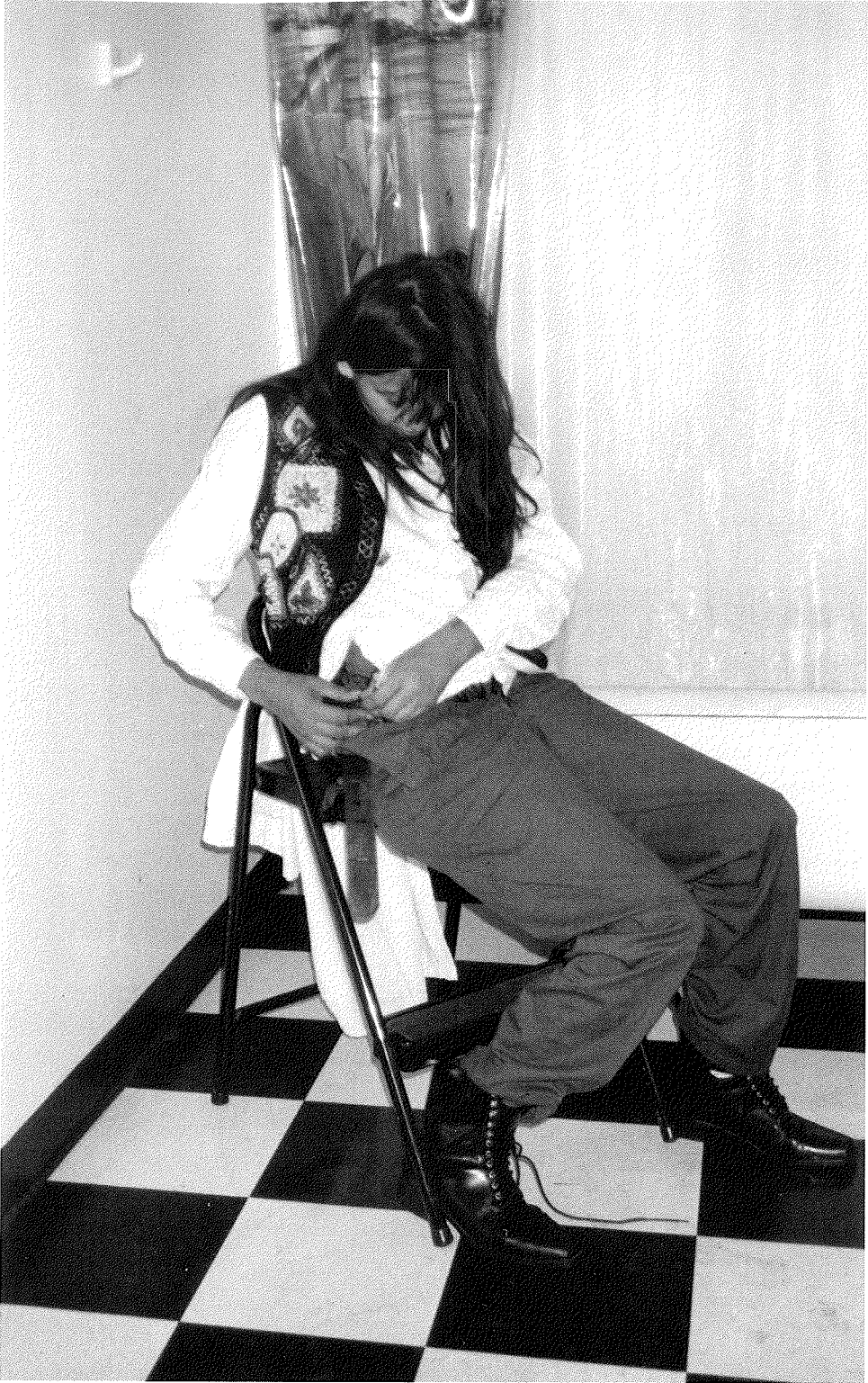
BURMA, 1994

Is it justified to contribute to the addictions of others? "I'm not holding a gun to their heads," laughed the "Opium King," Khun Sa. Indeed, the sale of opium and heroin financed the guns he did have for the arguably legitimate ends of defense of homeland and defense of Shan ethnicity and culture. "What are we to do?" demanded the impoverished peasants of the region; opium gave them their only chance for economic survival. To underscore the point, as the photographs of the equally justified Karenni insurgents show, without the sale of opium one's means of self-defense become that much more limited.

- 237. Khun Sa, the Opium King, beneath the flag of the Mong Tai Army, Ho Mong, Shan State.
- 238. Heroin addicted prostitute, USA.
- 239a. Opium poppy field, northwest Thailand.
- 239b. Weighing raw opium, northwest Thailand.
- 240. Opium addict, northwest Thailand.
- 241. Products of Khun Sa's workshop: women's shoes inset with gems. I was told that his clients included several royal families in neighboring countries. As you can see, Khun Sa was fairly well off.
- 242. Karenni Christians in their church. Their previous village had been razed by the Burmese. Their new homes were hidden deep in the jungle, under protection of the insurgents in Karenni State. Christians suffer frequent persecution in Burma. The dirty, ragged clothes of these people came to typify opiumlessness for me. The average living standard in Ho Mong seemed slightly higher.

- 243-45a. Karenni insurgents on drill.
- 245b-246. "Opium Soldiers" near Ho Mong. Note MTA insignia on lefthand man's cap in the lower photo.
247. The way to Ho Mong. The deep ruts in this trail suggest to me that its traffic could not have been completely secret, so the DEA and CIA must have known Khun Sa's whereabouts quite well. Khun Sa claimed that the U.S. had tried to assassinated him 43 times, but he also referred to prior collusion between himself and the CIA. A CIA spokesman assured me that this was "ludicrous. The CIA neither engages in nor condones drug trafficking." (See the case study "Off the Grid.")
248. Agitprop singer for Khun Sa's "Opium Soldiers," Chinese New Year, Ho Mong. Next day these men would go into action against the Burmese.

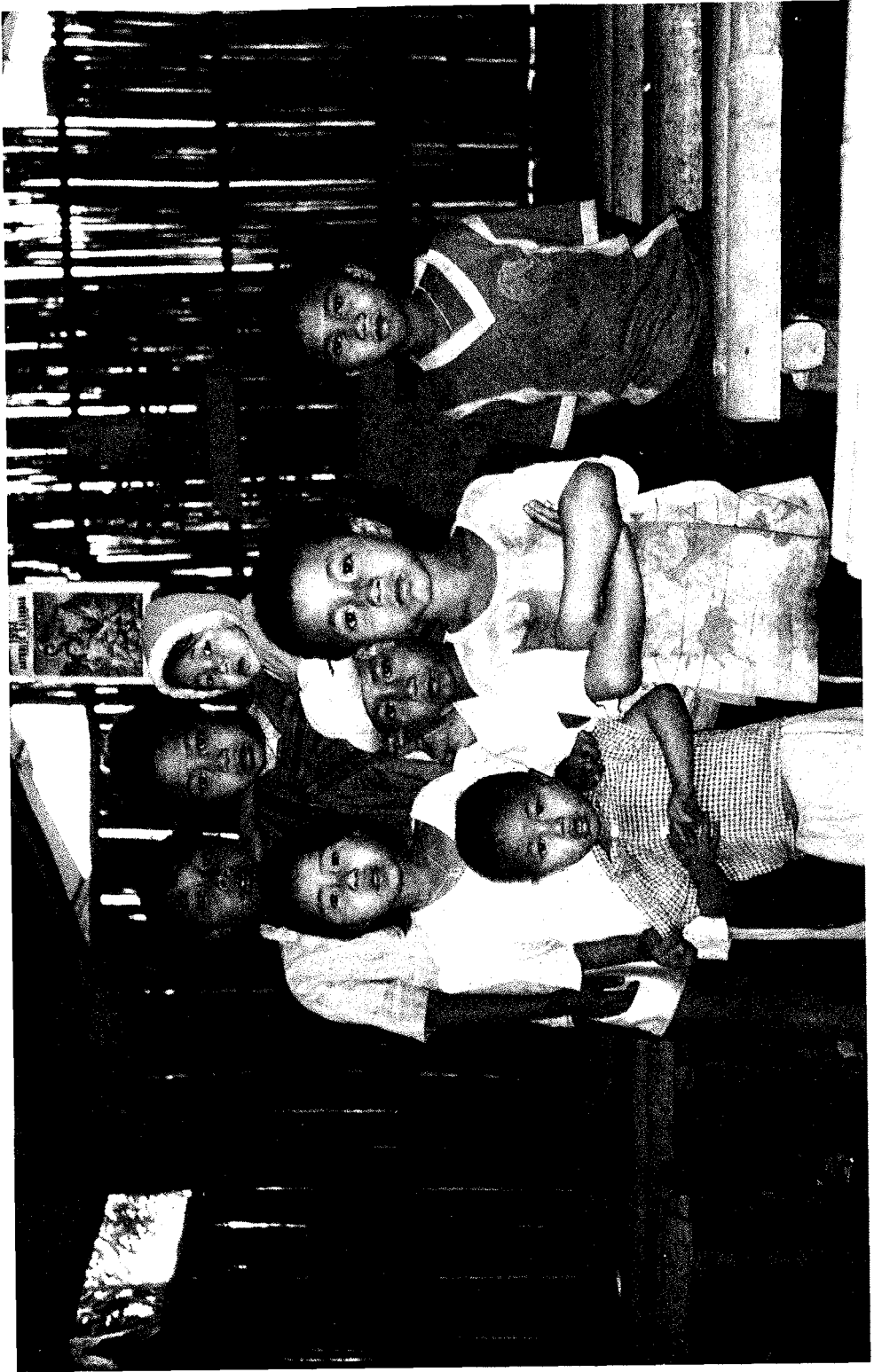


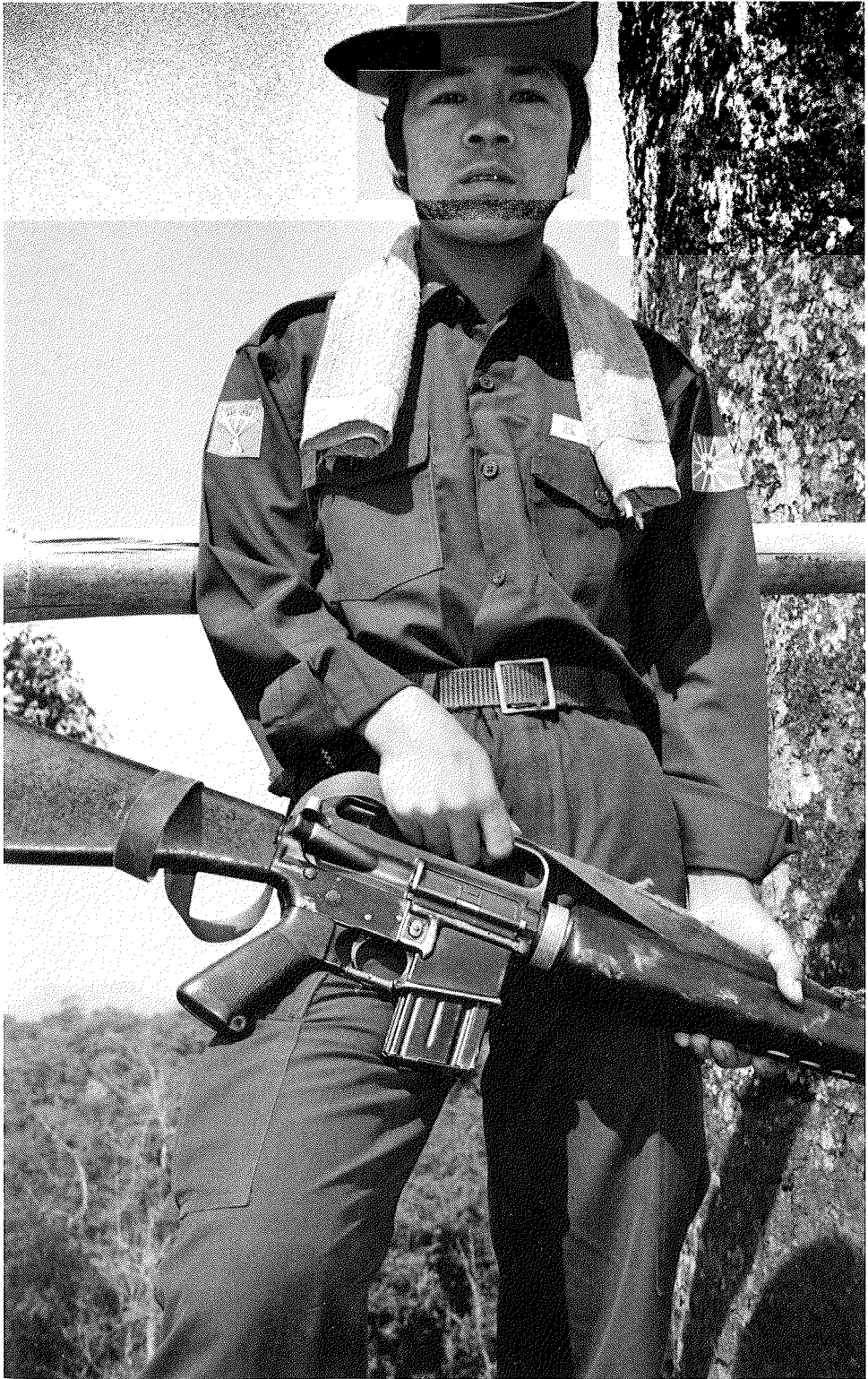




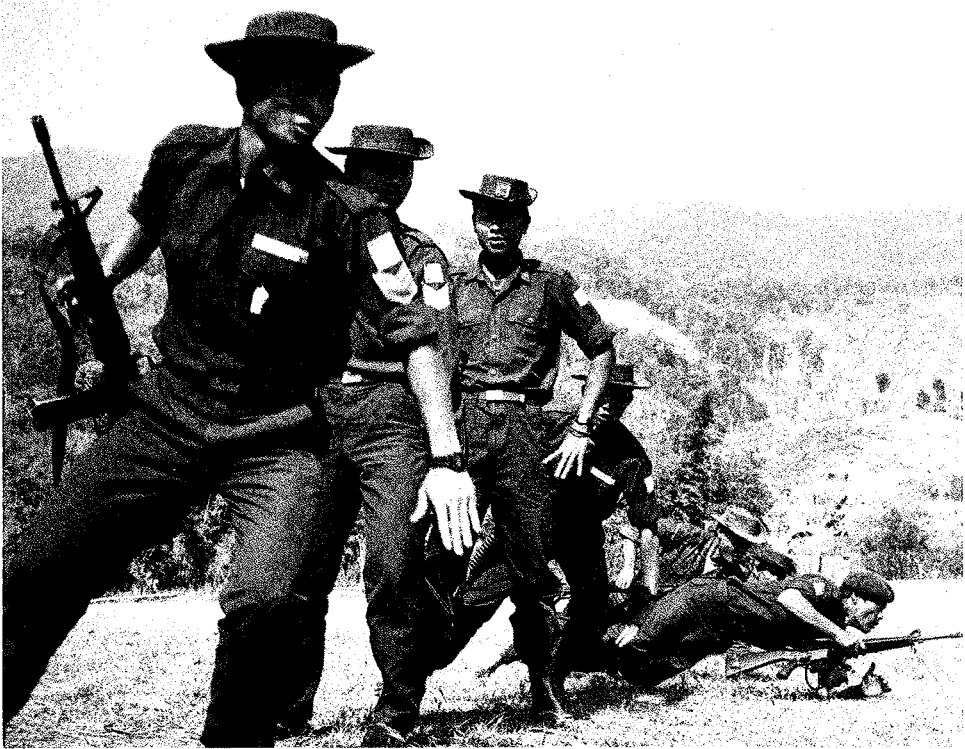






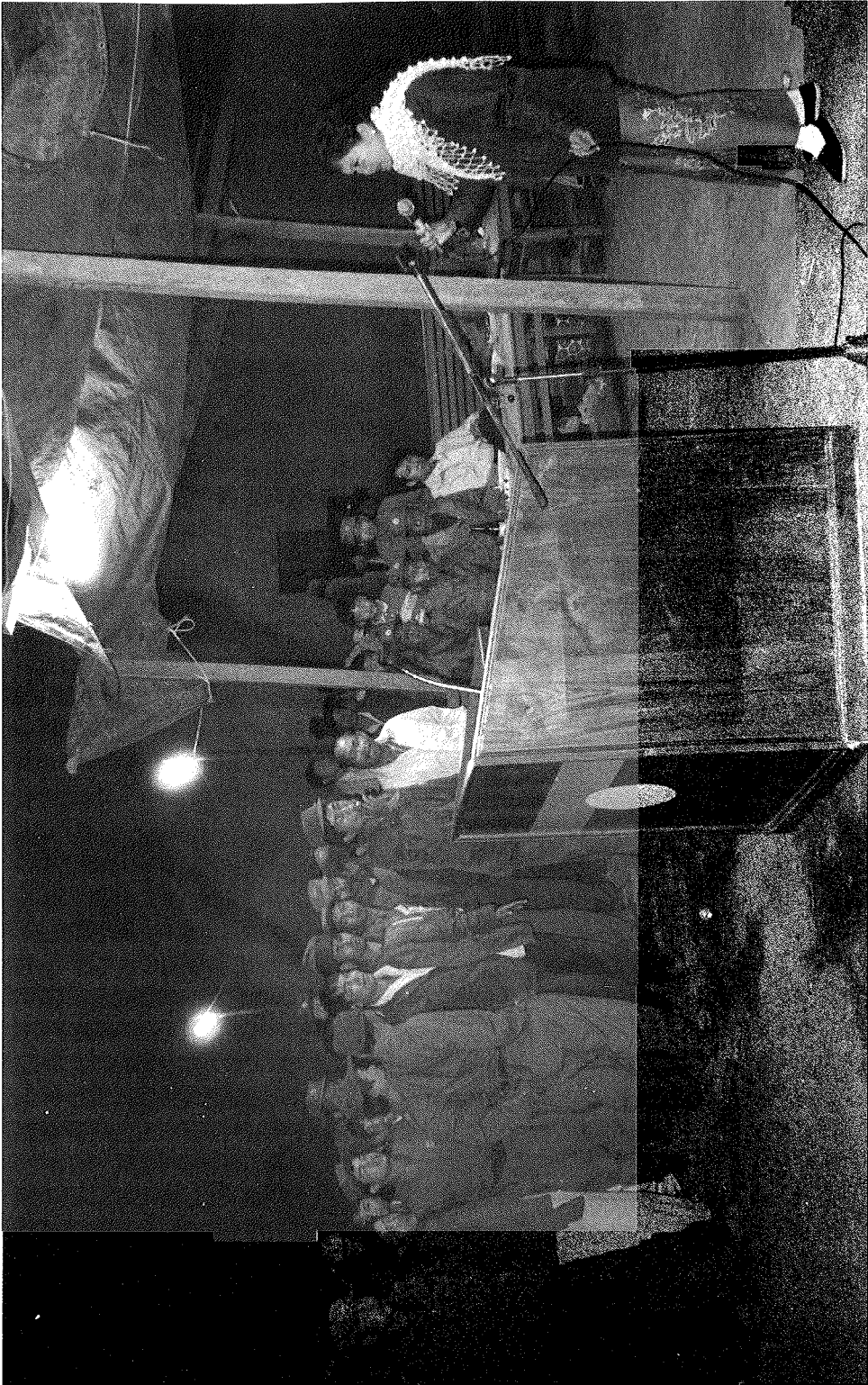












BUT WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

(1994)

The destruction of drugs by other people will destroy the Shan people. The destruction of drugs by our own people will deliver the Shan people.

KHUN SA (12 DECEMBER 1993)

MAE HONG SONG

At the northwest edge of Thailand, among mountains leaning, craggy, bulbous and misty like classical Chinese ink paintings, and not very far at all from the country that we once called Burma and are now supposed to call Myanmar, there is a town both largish and charmless named Mae Hong Song. It is not as friendly as the towns of the south, in part I think because the northern people are more reserved—the Scandinavians of Thailand—and also because it has been poisoned by tourists: tall and well-conditioned Germans, mainly, with tall narrow backpacks; but sometimes Dutch or French or even American couples—and they do seem to travel in pairs, which is why in Mae Hong Song it is uncommon to see a foreigner keeping company with a prostitute as in Bangkok. They fly here from Chiang Mai to go “trekking,” which is to say to pay somebody to lead or mislead them through the mountains and misty-streamered fields of various hill tribe villages—and here there are so many hill tribes! They say that Mae Hong Song is only twenty percent

Thai. The rest is all hill tribes: The White Karen, the Red Karen (whose women we know as Longnecks, on account of their custom of stretching themselves with brass rings over the years until they've become human giraffes—the foreigners love to take videos of them, while the Thai tourists prefer waterfalls), the Pa-O, the Lahu, the Liso, the Wa, the Meo, whom in our country we know as Hmong, who fought for our government in Laos as guerrillas during the Vietnam War and whom our government despicably abandoned there at the war's end—not here, though, for they like Americans, or at least they like American money—the Shan, who are here called Tai-Yai and who have their own state in Myanmar; the Burmese government has been trying to put them down for thirty years; and doubtless there are other tribes I have forgotten or never saw.

All of these people raise opium.

As I said, the tourists fly to Mae Hong Song. Locals and opium runners take the bus. I made this 18-hour trip four times: twice there and twice back. After the all-night ride from Bangkok, I'd see the bus station in Chiang Mai burning in the early morning darkness with all the radiance of white light-tubes; and the ticket-sellers were smoking cigarettes as they reached out for money from inside their glowing glass cages. Chiang Mai is crowded with tourists just like Mae Hong Song, but between them lies that nine-hour bus ride over the mountains. Hooded and jacketed, the conductor points like a flashlight at each passenger a long cylinder of metal from which he can extrude in various places tickets to various destinations, curving around the cylinder as they come out until they are long enough and he can tear them neatly off. When he did this I used to watch each face that he served, wondering if that one were involved in the trade. On the first trip, I saw a man silver-haired like a strange porcupine, with hard, alert features, who crossed his arms over the camouflage bag in his lap, and I thought he had a killer's face, but then I thought: Why should he need to be a killer to do what he does? Maybe all he has to do is pay people and then take money from the next pawn in line. The sky was beginning to glow pink and blue as we pulled away from that peopled terminus. My uncertainty soared like the blood-red sun rising through a bloody gorge in the clouds. I looked down into a bowl of trees and sliver-headed grasses, and we drove all morning and into the afternoon in that gasoline-smelling bus through a succession of dusty-leaved towns, the driver and conductor passing a bottle of liquid speed back and forth until it was empty, then throwing it out the window into the jungle while the little chain of flowers dedicated to Buddha swayed above the steering wheel, and I looked at each of the other passengers again and thought: This is where it is happening, but the how and the who of it I'll never know. Even if I meet the Opium King himself I'll never know.

The name of the Opium King was Khun Sa¹. According to old newspaper reports, his headquarters was in Myanmar somewhere. (The border is closed, my friend D. said to me. Maybe you have some problem go there. Close from Burmese

fighting.) Khun Sa's Chinese chemists supposedly turned out the purest heroin in the world. He controlled fifty percent of the opium poppy fields in the Golden Triangle, the newspapers said. But what do newspapers know?

The silver-haired man watched everybody for the whole nine hours. Then we got to Mae Hong Song and I saw the big Caucasian tourists and the city swallowed me up and I thought: I'll probably never know anything here, either.

BAI

At 6:30 in the morning, dogs and cats slept in Mae Hong Song's streets of foggy darkness, and a barefoot monk trudged, his saffron-colored gown still dark like rust, while long fingers of light probed the fog from slow-moving cars in the main street whose inset squares of wooden walls and bluish segments of shut gratings resembled all the minds around us still coagulated in sleep. In the Chinese chicken-pork restaurant they shivered around orange coals, stirring pots and heaping up higher mounds of noodles on the shelves of their glass cabinet. Within a few moments the streets were filled with lavender light. The market was already open. Tuktuk and motorcycle drivers in their red vests watched the world knowingly and pulled their wool caps a little lower. Just opposite a stand of pineapples and hanging pans, a brown-eye Meo lady with pale lips and a wide shield-like face squatted behind a table, trying to sell tigers' teeth and inlaid knives to the tourists. Her name was Bai. She wore silver earrings like daggers and a black vest embroidered with pink and orange flowers. (She don't know where her ideas come from, D. translated. Just for beauty.) Looking down behind the table, I saw another vest which she had half finished making, and two children, one almost a baby, sleeping on a mat at her feet.

I bought from her a well-carven replica of an old opium scale. Bai said that people often used an Indian one-rupee coin for a weight. One rupee's weight of opium used to be thirty baht,² but now it was 100 baht or more.

Last year she'd been rich, with a car of her own and a pig farm in Chiang Mai. But her husband had done business with the wrong man, who'd offered him 10,000 baht for seven grams of heroin; and that was why he was now doing fifty years in Section C down in Bangkok, and that was possibly part of the reason why although Bai was only thirty-three she looked fifty now with her wide reddish face and wrinkled hands.

Sometimes it's so sad, because she has six children, D. Said. She say the first one is fourteen years. Already he must leave his school to help her. All boys, except the number four girl. At her stand she make 500-600 baht every day except for yellow flower³ season when many people from Bangkok come to see the yellow (poppies?) on mountains. Then she make 1,000 baht.

Lying on the mat, the youngest boy gazed out from under a dirty comforter with his big black eyes.

She know heroin is bad but she need money, D. said.⁴

A PRETTY GARDEN

Once or twice a month, when she could afford it, Bai took the hour-long bus ride back to her village in the hills where the pigs wagged their tails and nosed, grunting over the hard yellow ground behind bamboo fences and Bai caught her other children up in her arms laughing. Her brother took care of them for her. She had to ask her brother where the best place to show me was because she was a woman and had always stayed out of that particular business and also because it was January now and so almost the end of the season. Her brother pointed past the other Meo ladies in black with strange bands of embroidery on their sleeves like chains of rose petals somehow flattened after the fashion of one of those representations of our globe in which elliptical segments of longitude are laid side by side; upon those petals were superimposed squares and diamonds of a darker brilliance; Bai's brother pointed past them and beyond the village trees and up toward a tea-colored ridge of mountains.

If you followed his finger this is how you went. You went up a dirt road a little way into the mountains, then into somebody's vegetable garden where a path had been sandal-etched between rows of unknown greens. You came to a barbed wire fence, ducked through, and entered another field of vegetables at the bottom of a piney ravine where the path widened like hips, then narrowed again and went on another eight kilometers to broach the border secretly where Karen guerrillas were waiting in the jungle to ambush Burmese soldiers; but today you were going only a few steps further, to the swale where the ravine narrowed; and there the poppies grew in such beauty, some snow-white, other violet-bordered with bleached ovals inside, still others a lovely red with just a hint of lavender, but every one of them white in their hearts, with yellow pistils in which bee-striped flies crawled. The flowers gave off a bitter weedy smell. I smelled again: maybe just a hint of alcohol, something expensive and French like 100-year-old cognac; or more likely I was imagining things. The flower-hearts were wet with resin. I stuck my finger in one and licked it. It tasted just like it smelled. I had a sore throat and was hoping to numb it, but nothing happened. I licked again. I began to feel a clean and pleasant coolness in my throat.⁵

D. smiled at me. —Opium so good for medicine, she said. For everything! Even for hair! One lady friend me, she put for hair. Because she have almost no hair. Every night she put. And after five-six month she get much long and so beautiful hair!

The man said that it took three flowers to make one smoke. This was a small field. A single family worked it in order to smoke for themselves.

I thought about another Meo man I'd met in Mae Hong Song; he wore long shiny black pajamas whose cuffs were embroidered in diamonds with nested triangular hues of orange, red and blue; when he was younger, his parents grew opium and he always looked for the flower because it was so beautiful; and I asked him why

his parents had stopped.

The soldiers come with helicopters and come cutting, cutting, cutting, he said. We grow again, and they cut again, cut again, so we get tired.

And I wondered if some authoritarian somewhere took pleasure in the grubby little victory which was so typical of the so-called War on Drugs, which is really a war against poor people like Bai with her wrinkled hands tucked in between her thighs as she squatted on the cement, or Bai's youngest boy, who loved to eat dog meat but mainly lay shivering on a thin mat on the cold cement while his father began the second of his fifty years.⁶

There in the opium garden where Bai's brother (patient, a little morose) showed me how the green seedpods were full of tiny soft wet white spherical seeds like some kind of caviar, I asked what he thought about opium. He had been very afraid to show this place to a foreigner, and never would have without many pleas from D. and some money from me; so I was not surprised when he said: Before, we think about it's good for us because my father, mother, grandfather do always and we always follow tradition. Now we think anti-drug because of addict, no good, but what can we do?

And if the government were to change its position and say that opium was OK again, what would you do?

The man's face lit up trustingly. —Then I want to grow! Because good money for me, and I have much experience...

SOME THOUGHTS UPON VISITING A SMOKERY

Maybe I am still not making clear enough the poverty of these people. Because it coexists with beauty—the clothing that Bai and the other women make, the white cows jingling their bells as they follow the creek beside the dusty road, the well-built wooden houses under their red flower-trees—it is easy for an outsider like myself to think this sufficient amelioration. A day or two among them will disabuse. You cannot miss the endless, exhausting work, the lice-ridden nights, the sickness. And every village has a TV or a video player in which they can see the things they cannot have. To reinforce this knowledge come the foreign tourists, who are motored in like gods, and can do anything. In short, there are richer places in the world, and the hill people know it. You cannot understand any Opium King unless you remember this.

Inside the houses of Bai's village the brown, dusty heaps of corn are the only treasure, strung unhusked above the dirt floors like monstrous roots. Rats move in the cribs of brown rice. The floor is thick with ash, and the reek of woodsmoke brings tears to the eyes. Maybe a man sits in a corner smoking a cigarette in an immense bamboo waterpipe. Or a prematurely aged woman whose body is grimed and sooted (Meo people never take shower! D. whispered laughing) sits at a hand

sewing machine, making an immense ribbon of embroidery for her daughter's wedding. In one of these houses a man weighs out the dark and sticky clot of opium against a one-rupee piece just as Bai said (now sitting on a stool in the middle of the bare dirt, petting the many children who wander to her), and the darkness fills with the bitter, weedy smell. In another house an addict comes to smoke the second of his three daily pipes. Here the opium is weighted against a one-baht coin. One baht's weight is what he smokes in a day, and it costs him fifty baht—not much for you, quite a lot for him.⁷ This man has been smoking for five years. He is thirty-eight years old. He says that the first time he smoked, he felt very strong. Now he is weak if he doesn't smoke. After a day without opium, he gets very feeble. After two days he gets sick.

The man who keeps the house does not smoke opium. He does not like the smell. Perhaps he is a hypocrite and perhaps he is a poisoner and perhaps he is just a businessman. I have no opinion about him. He did not make this man into a wretch. The man did it to himself. A man is responsible for what he is.⁸ Another opium house proprietor, whom I like very much, once said to me: For the other business you must carry something heavy, you must make promotion. But this we can keep at home and many come and we are happy. —Opium helped this man to be successful and good to his family.

In a small porcelain dish the addict grinds together with the butt of a cigarette lighter the old black opium and the new opium, which has a deep ocher color. He mixes in a white powder that is a medication for pain. (Easy for fire, D. explains. Not everyone do that.) He goes to the bamboo-slatted bedstead and lies on his side with his knees up, smoking the long pipe that he made himself, cooking the little balls of opium on a safety pin until they sweat and then taking them away from the can of quietly burning lamp oil to suck them into his body amidst a crackling of opium smoke while the oil can's single flame watches him so tenderly.

When you feel weak, you a little bit opium eat and get energy, he explains.

The proprietor sits beside the bed, watchful and serious. He's already shoved his children out of the house—and here I remember a prostitute in New York who used to push her kids out into the street's cold and angry night every time she did business; and in both cases I remember thinking: Why is this activity somehow shameful? Granted, the people who send their children away have become bad, but what about the people in power who decide to make everyone ashamed? At any rate, the children come tiptoeing back, drinking water from an old motor oil can and watching as the addict's eyes begin to sleepily squint and squint a little more; the lips draw open, showing the blackened teeth; the fingers slowly and rhythmically twitch. In that roasting oil smell he alone of anyone belongs. His face grows relaxed and sunny at last.

How you feel? I ask.

With an effort he raises his tongue to speak. —So strong, he replies.

His wife is sitting on the dirt floor watching. She says: He gets so lazy. But what can I do?

RAK TAI VILLAGE

Bai's village I will not name, but not so far from its ocher dirt beaten down by years or maybe centuries of sandals and of the bare feet of small dirty-faced children in the handmade black Meo shirts embroidered with stars and pinkish-orange zones of other-colored geometries was another village called Ban Rak Tai.⁹ This village was not Meo, but Tai-Yai, with many Wa people also, and a large number of ethnic Chinese families whose men once fought for the Kuomintang (KMT), and because Mao won the KMT lost, and in 1949 those soldiers had fled to Thailand. —Please you tell the government about our passport, a KMT man pleaded. Because if we have Thai ID card we can go anywhere, work anywhere. Just now we have no money, because Taiwan government change, so we cannot work there anymore. To stay here in controlled area we must 1,000 baht for plastic ID with thumbprint and photo. To get Thai ID card [he showed me a red internal passport entitled "Alien Certificate"] I sell my three buffaloes to pay, because I must pay 1,500 baht to Immigration, and every year 200 baht, and still I am not citizen! And now I have no buffalo anymore.

Ban Rak Tai is high in the mountains. At night the stars are more numerous than the seeds of a pomegranate, all beautifully scattered, some brighter, some faint as sandspecks, spreading forever across the sky into which your breath-steam rises above the immensely complicated silhouettes of trees. At 5:00 in the morning the roosters begin to crow, and then black dogs with faces like bears begin to chase each other with a succession of quick scutterings and skinny snaky yelps. Then the hens and chicks begin. By 7:00 it is light with a cold clear sky, but only the dogs control the town, fighting and licking each other in the dirt streets between bamboo palisades. Finally somebody clears his throat and a baby whimpers and the cold air begins to smell like woodsmoke. It is at this time that the men squat outside around fires together while their wives cook breakfast. For the men it is the easy time before the long day in the fields. They talk together about being poor. One man with a Thai mother still does not have Thai nationality because he has a Chinese father. He cannot go to Bangkok to work because he cannot afford the Alien Certificate. They squat around the fire and talk about things like that, warming their tanned and smoke-blackened hands.

So it is no wonder that when I bring the conversation around to opium, their faces brighten a little. Selling opium is their one hope. Knowing that they don't know me, I don't ask them if that's what they do. Instead we talk about the Emperor of these parts.

Khun Sa he is number one in the whole world! a man cries. He has over one million thousand citizens!¹⁰ He is such good heart. No one else help us.

The mass of forest is still tea-colored and indistinct. A dog barks at a horse under a thatch roof, and the horse grunts and jingles his bell. I look in the direction which yesterday the bus driver pointed when we had come up out of the vast jungle gorge and turned toward the blue and greenish-blue mountains and the driver was saying that right now there was a lot of fighting in Burma. —Most of the Burmese died, he said. The Khun Sa is waiting for them. He is always in the deep jungle, always watching for them. Sometimes the Burmese is stupid.

How many soldiers does he have? I asked.

More than 100,000. Maybe 200,000. He take good care for the citizen of him, so everyone love him. He has school for the student. If one family have five boy, he bring four boy for teach for soldier and for education, and leave one boy to take care of parents. He teaches even English language. He take care for everything.¹¹

And then he interrupted himself and pointed. —Look! Up there! Top of the mountain is Khun Sa!

And I looked up a dry ridge to see a higher dry ridge, and then veering extremely loftily into the sky, a greenish dusty battlement of jungle.

Rak Tai village was very close to that place, and that was why I was there.

So now, on this cold morning among the farmers awaiting breakfast, I point in the proper direction and ask if someone will take me there.

They have mined the paths, a man says. Because Khun Sa he fear Burmese.

The paths are in fact mined, and the soldier who lives among the sunflowers above the artificial lake tells me that eleven people have been blown to pieces going that way in the last year. But maybe there is another reason why Khun Sa has done this. A KMT man tells me: This village is in a Wa area. Wa Opium King he always fight for thirty years against Khun Sa.¹²

Then I begin to understand. I had thought that there was only one Opium King and that he was some kind of super-gangster. Undoubtedly Khun Sa is the biggest cheese in this mountain dairy, but there are many hill tribes and they all grow opium and they all have people running things, so they all have Opium Kings of a sort, whether they admit it or not. The tribes who wend in and out of Myanmar also use the opium in part to finance their own liberation movements there. Those movements fight the Burmese and they sometimes fight each other. Or, as Major-General Khin Nyunt, First Secretary of the Burmese dictatorship, remarked: *Since there are already divisions within the insurgent groups, even if we are able to reach an understanding with one group, the other groups will not agree to that. Hence the claim by some political parties that we will not have to go to war is not true. We must act according to the maxim: We go to war because we hate war.*¹³

TA KHUN MONG

In Ban Rak Tai there were many Wa soldiers, bitter, wrinkled and cold, who kept saying: What can we do? If we do not grow opium we cannot eat. —I especially remember one skinny man who was crazy. He kept winking and pretending to eat the cat. His general, whose name was Ta¹⁴ Khun Mong, said that the man had gone insane at a very young age when the Burmese killed his father and mother.

Ta Khun Mong and his soldiers were members of the Wa State Union (WSU), which had two branches, one under Ma Ha Sang in Thailand, the other under Ta Ni Lai in Burma.¹⁵

And these two are fighting? I asked him slyly.

No. Not yet so friendly, but they work together for politics.

I never had an opportunity to meet either of those men, but from this description they sound like autonomous warlords, which means that here were two more Opium Kings. —The origin of opium came from Wa! said Ta Khun Mong proudly. Just now Wa in Thailand is no more growing, but Wa in Burma is growing in Wa State, though not yet for heroin. We want to sell for medicine business for ourselves, but we doesn't know the market.

And you use the opium money to fight with the Burmese soldiers?

We never fight with the Burmese, but they fight with us; they is very crazy.

I understand that Khun Sa's army is fighting with yours. If you go to see Khun Sa will he kill you?

The general threw his palms down. —Khun Sa, he doesn't do anything to me, but I don't want to meet him, because he make the people fight the Burmese. You want to see him? Better I take you to Wa State. I can bring you to something. I have very good experience.

THE DOCTOR

Passing the market in Mae Hong Song where Bai sat stitching glowing red, green and blue snowflakes onto black cloth beside the table of nuts with wriggle-legged spiders inside them (five baht in India, where they were made, thirty-five baht here), the minibus, directed by Ta Khun Mong, who had not been able to find his friend and so must proceed by slightly more official ways, turned down a jungle road and stopped in front of a courtyard. This was the unmarked office of the Mong Tai Army (MTA), and of the Shan State Restoration Council, of both of which organizations Khun Sa happened to be President.

D. and I sat at a table in that sunken patio, half walled in from the jungle by a trellis of vines, and we drank tea and gazed at the wooden deer-heads that hung above the filing cabinet. Every time we finished our tea, the boy came immediately to refill our cups. At the far end of this concrete world the ones who belonged

here (most with the darker skins of Burmese) stood talking quietly and occasionally looking us up and down without friendliness. Some of the men were tattooed with the hooks and loops and knots of Burmese letters scrawled large down their arms and across their chests and backs. Aside from the boy who kept bringing us tea, we were alone except for a man who sat in the corner almost within touching distance of me, gazing sullenly down at his sandals and evidently listening to our every word. Ta Khun Mong had long since gone back to Ban Rak Tai, pleased, as far as I could tell, with the 500 baht I'd given him. We sat and drank our tea until the old man came.

How did you find this place? the old man said.

We told him.

Who are you?

We told him.

And what is your purpose?

To understand Khun Sa.

Many years ago past, nobody understand him, the old man said. He is a giant man, a great man. He want to eat. He want to support his family and his soldier. Sometimes he conflict, you know, because people talk talk talk...

Next there came the doctor, who was the liaison officer. He had begun by studying veterinary medicine because he thought that he would do better that way, but then he joined the revolution and the revolution needed doctors, not veterinarians. For him there was no doubt that Khun Sa was a hero, a Shan leading the Shan on to continue their struggle for liberation from the Burmese. He was a Shan himself, of course. After an hour or two in his company I could see that he was a good soul with a sincere heart. He questioned both D. and me for awhile, and we coyly exchanged our P.O. box addresses like intelligence agents, which after all is what we both were. Finally he said: OK. Now do you have any questions to ask me?

And of course I asked him to tell me his version of the story, and here it is:

So, in Vietnam War the CIA, they have to organize the hill tribes against the Communists, he began. They want to be like missionaries, to recruit for their operation without spending money. So they get involved in the heroin business.¹⁶ They get the formula for heroin from the Merck Company. Heroin has been legalized as a miracle drug for sixteen years. The CIA people they know the business. You can imagine the people who come here. When Vietnam War finish they make the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration]. But many CIA, they don't want to stop living like kings. They have many friends in KMT, and KMT is in Shan State since 1952. They know the Shan people is so easy to manipulate. Ex-CIA along with KMT they want to get rid of patriotic group in Shan State—

You mean Khun Sa?

It is not just Khun Sa, it is almost everyone. Because the Burmese oppress so much the Shan! They go to the village, they rape your family, they take all your

belongings, and then if they catch opium they sell to drug dealer. Because humanity is so selfish. Before Burmese independence, you know, the British overlords they would come to your banana orchard, fertilize it well, and then confiscate it from you. After independence, the Burmese soldier they would arrive at banana orchard, tear each banana off the tree one by one, take a bite, throw down and say: No good! —Because both are robbers, but the Burmese also are spoilers. If you make even vegetables, the Burmese will steal from you. But opium is black gold—black gold you can hide...

So the KMT financed certain groups? Which groups?

Let us just say enemies of the Shan.

Such as the Wa?

Ah, it's even more complicated. In 1948 the Burmese they start the Burmese Communist Party.¹⁷ With independence they go underground. In 1950 or 1952, when KMT come to Shan State, the Red China also want to get rid of KMT, and they set up certain opium armies also.¹⁸ They attack the Wa; from BCP the Wa is almost eliminated...¹⁹

And what about the DEA? I asked him. You were implying that the DEA is doing something, presumably fighting Khun Sa...

Oh, no, he smiled. Once there is no opium, then no work for DEA anymore.²⁰

THE OUTCOME

I was anxious to ask Khun Sa himself more about this. The doctor thought that it would be no problem. He said that the northern part of Shan State, where the stronghold was, had Shan ladies so beautiful that all the mosquitoes went around with broken legs from slipping off their smooth, smooth skins. This naturally excited my professional interest. D. also was hopeful about seeing everything. But the next day we received a letter from the doctor, "sadfully informing" us that his superior felt it inconvenient to meet the press just now, given the intensity of the fighting against the Burmese. To console us, the old man got out a sumi brush and composed a lovely painting of a bamboo forest in D.'s notebook.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE KAREN?

The taxi driver, who had a German football hat and a hard, shiny, reddish face, shouted in his raspy voice that the thing to do if you wanted to learn about opium and maybe smoke it was to go trekking. That was what all the other tourists did.

He say, just now you go to the Karen village by day and you see only the girl and the womans—many, many, because the soldier they are in the forest fighting with the Burmese. They come back sometimes at night.²¹

What are the Karen fighting about?

Maybe politics like independence politics. Or maybe about opium in high Burmese mountains. Because the opium tree, he love so much the cold.

What is the name of the Karen version of Khun Sa?

He don't know, but he know his house.

At that time we were in the market, negotiating with the driver as to how much he would be permitted to rob me that day, and pickup trucks were pulling up from the hill tribe towns with backs and heads darkening the bars beneath their canvas-roofed backs, and sacks of rice and peanuts were on top and I knew that if there was opium in some of those sacks no one but the middlemen would ever find it; in fact, D. and I had taken a drive to the black market at the Burmese border, whose red-and-white-striped pole was not unlike one of those dust-covered trees which time or insects had felled; it blocked the road just beyond a shack whose laundry was hardly more than rags, and three very supercilious Thai soldiers emerged from their thatch-roofed island and said that the area was so dangerous on account of Khun Sa that no foreigners could proceed;²² and the driver told me that Khun Sa's opium runners came in every night along that ridge just to our right,²³ and that if they found anybody they blew a birdlike note through a rolled leaf to summon helpers and then killed the person on the spot; D. also told me this: The last year the Burmese take someone of the Thai government man about two weeks. Because already the Burmese they keep Thais about six people. Maybe they don't kill; they take hostage for some guarantee, and some government in Bangkok he go to help them and they take him, too! And then I asked the driver: Do you yourself ever go to the black market at Huey Phonng? and D. replied: He afraid. Maybe Burmese take the car. He never go! ...and I thought about how this place was riddled with so many narrow zones of allegiance and fear; this was the place that the opium came from; but the really interesting thing was that as we were driving back D. said to me: If we want to ask about the opium, all we must do is ask any bus come from border with only one or two person. Because they must come from black market. Otherwise so dangerous they don't come here.

So in Mae Hong Song, half a block from Bai's stand, I stood looking at buses and buses and more buses coming in from the border with ever so many anonymous sacks on top; and a baby with very black eyes stared at the world over his mother's shoulder and a Karen Longneck climbed down from a minivan with ever so many glitters of sunlight on her multiringed throat, and I said: Please tell the driver that he's hired. Please tell him to take us to a village of Karen soldiers.

MR. T.

The driver did not fact know the head of the Karen, who a Karen man later told me was named Aum Rawley,²⁴ an individual of about fifty-two years whose assistant, Saw Maw Reh, was about sixty; according to the Thai newspaper *The Nation*

(Saturday, 22 January 1994), the leader of the Karen insurgents was General Bo Mya, his Karen National Union (KNU) being the strongest group;²⁵ the article said that General Mya had just denounced the Shan State People's Party for opening talks with the Burmese government; a general in the Karen village to which we were now proceeding would soon tell me that the name of the leader was Bo Mut Be Tu, who might or might not have been the same as Bo Mya (he wasn't); Saw Maw Re was the head of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), which was a powerful organization and had once enjoyed even wider support until in the late 1970s it tore itself apart into pro- and anti-Communist factions; at any rate, the driver did not know any of these people, but suddenly there rose before us more cool and lovely tea-colored mountains above the young girls in conical hats who were walking down the road, the ricefields shiny with water again, and then we came to a village where just around the corner from a roof of dried leaves which resembled stucco (it was a restaurant whose entrance-tables were walled by immense jars of pickled lychee-fruits) there stood a very substantial house in which the driver's friend lived. His name was Mr. T. He was not the head of the Karen, but he was very heavily involved with the Karen in his business dealings and apparently also helped them in various semi-covert ways for which they were grateful. He was a "head of village," according to D. I never found out exactly what this title meant. D. herself was a head of village in the south; my first thought was that she was something like a mayor and maybe she was and maybe Mr. T. was, but on the other hand when we went to Mr. T.'s village another time with a young driver who did not know the way he asked many people and none of them knew where Mr. T.'s house was, which either means that there was not much between that head of village and his particular constituency or else there were several heads of village in any given town; at any rate, I relate this solely because it is another link in my beautifully articulated gold bracelet of ignorance. As D. always said: If you doesn't know somebody, you can hear no answer anymore. —That was why I wanted to know him.

When you enter anyone's house, but particularly that of a head of village, you must take off your shoes, because most likely, as was the case with Mr. T., he actually has a floor. Mr. T.'s was of reddish chocolatish wood of a remarkable luster. There was a Buddhist shrine not unlike a birdhouse, a calendar with the King's portrait, and a few wooden heads of animals. Mr. T. himself was dark and stout and solid, his wife likewise; they both looked Burmese. His village was not yet the Karen village; that one he himself would bring us to the next morning when our driver in his Deutscher Füssball-Bund cap rolled us again down the long road whose walls and ceiling were fog, and a girl striding with a yoke across her shoulders and a heavy bucket of water hanging down from each arm so that she resembled a set of opium scales began as a silhouette, became a girl as we reached her, and then when I looked back she was already a black cipher again. It was early. The roadside trees were not yet reddened by dust. The world was cold and wet. Every now and then

motorcycle riders passed, almost always two to a vehicle, and they wore dark face-masks like bandits. Then we came into a sunny place between scraggy jungle trees and the colors leaped and glowed while fog-streamers wriggled in the blue sky. —At Mr. T.'s the daughter was kneeling with her mother, eating soup and rice on that vast and gleaming floor.

This season the fighting season, the driver said while Mr. T.'s wife poured us some tea and bowed so courteously to us with clasped hands. So now many Burmese soldiers die. Always the Burmese die, not so much the Karen. When the Burmese die, the Karen take their gun and everything.²⁶ So very good for them! They waiting for fighting all the time; they don't worry about the fighting.

And now as we drove deeper into the mountains Mr. T. said: Maybe Karen kill some Burmese four-five days ago.

You must be pleased, I said.

I hate the fighting, he said. So many Burmese die, so many Karen die. The Thai people is expensive life, but Burmese people is cheap life; they die so early.

Who is more powerful, the Karen Army or the MTA?

Always it changes. Katchin tribe was bigger than Khun Sa in north before but not now. Now Khun Sa is the biggest in the north. Katchin and Pa-O and Wa not so big. But Karen they are very big in south. Bigger than Khun Sa in south.

And all this is in response to Burmese oppression?

Sometimes Ne Win²⁷ good and sometimes the soldier of Ne Win bad. Sometimes Ne Win order for the right way, and the soldier do for the wrong way like mistake or something worse. In Burma there are many nationalities. Sometimes Burmese is good, to stop the nationalities from fighting with each other.

Now there was another Thai checkpoint where border police waited beside a stop sign in a hut half-roofed with leaves; the Karen villagers walked on through with their shoulder bags of grass and again I thought how easy it must be to bring opium through. Seeing me, they shouted a halt, and Mr. T. rolled the window down and spoke with them soothingly but firmly. In a trice the barrier was up and we went on through.

D. cleared her throat and said: Mr. T. he says if soldiers fighting and die, no problem. But if soldiers no die and is cut off leg, he is so sad.

NAI SOI VILLAGE

As we came into this Red Karen village I saw a brown creek flowing down the main street, and a barefooted girl stood in the water sweeping. Clothes hung out to dry on bamboo fences and on ropes between poles and trees. Farther down, where the stream was channeled into a slow-flowing gutter, an old woman in a conical hat squatted, grimly whacking the life out of wet and balled-up laundry with a stick. Here the sun was warm, and bamboos reached their canted rows of dagger-leaves up like the blue-

smoke mountains behind, and dusty feather-grass grew twice as high as a man's head.

What do these people do for money? I asked Mr. T.

Oh, Aum Rawley he doesn't do for the opium business, said Mr. T., and somehow I didn't believe him. This area makes from business ruby, animal from Burma, and like that. They sell 7,000 buffalo a month.

We turned into a small compound of thatched houses whose dry-leaf roofs resembled wasp nests, and a retired assistant-to-a-general named Sa Duray said that he would answer my questions.

Why do the Karenni fight?

On 9 August 1948 the Burmese come fighting with them first.²⁸ We have wolfram,²⁹ emerald, aquamarine, peridot, marble. The Burmese kill many. For the women they rape before they kill. They kill first, never ask.

Needless to say, the reason that the Karenni fought was much more complicated than that. Pre-independence Burma had been a weird patchwork of laws and jurisdictions, with some minorities, such as the Shan and the Karenni—but not the Karen—being allowed the right to secede if they wished it. This exacerbated strain among the various groups. Some Karen and Karenni had doubtless resorted to terrorism; successive Burmese governments for their part resorted to state terror. Fighting had begun in 1948, and over the succeeding decades it turned uglier and uglier, with the blame of atrocity tipping heavy on the Burmese side.

So then what did the Karen do?

The man smiled and made motions of pulling a trigger.

Is two kinds of Karen, White and Red Karen, he went on. Two different language. Together we help each other and fight. We get weapons from the black market.

And what do they pay for the weapons?

Only money, the man said, and I did not believe him, either.

So after almost half a century, who is winning—you or the Burmese?

No one. Now are the Burmese fighting. Always the Burmese fighting again.

And what is your village accomplishing?

We have a small group fighting in the mountains, but we have much experience. We go very often. This is a village of soldiers. Two years ago it was very loud even though Burmese border is ten kilometers away. You could hear the voice of the fighting: *GLUN! GLUN!*

Do you ever work with the MTA?

Khun Sa doesn't help us. We never keep in touch, but also we never fight with them.

A woman came out of a basketwoven hut and she had yellow thanakuh-paste on her cheeks, something which I had seen before in Burma, and I realized that what Sa Duray had said was the literal truth. They had come from Myanmar, bringing their families with them.

How old is this village?

He know this place about eighteen year, said D., because he is soldier. Before there was Thai first aid post here. The people here they begin to come to make village in 1978.

And it's a good life here?

Is the food for soldier only rice, salt, some chili, some water, the man explained quietly. And what happen? They can get no energy for fighting.

Across the dirt street I saw a soldier sitting in a raised room of woven twigs, stroking his remaining leg absently in darkness as he sat in what could not really be called lotus position anymore, massaging his hip and thigh, opening his mouth as he listened to my questions being translated while the sunlight came in making small rectangles between those wickerwork walls, and a lance of sunlight struck him full in the face but he never flinched or turned; then I looked into his tiny white-slimer eyes and realized that he was also blind.

So it was a mine?

Yes, a mine from Burmese soldier. When the head of the Karen soldier order this way you can go, you must go this way even if you afraid. He know before there is a mine, but he is good soldier; he go in front and he hope he can avoid. They go to forest to wait for Burmese soldiers.

And then what happened?

His eyes go and he cannot see, and his leg is finished, cut off like tree for burning. But first he fell unconscious, never felt anything until afterward when the pain came in his leg. And after that ten soldiers come to him. Now they help him with small money, not too much because Karen soldiers don't have much. When he's sick sometimes, he can take some money for medicine. Khun Sa soldier they help family because they have money. But here just rice, oil, salt, very small money.

Ask him his opinion of the Burmese soldiers.

For the first time the man came alive, his voice deep and virile now, his head shaking, his hands pounding the floor, his dead eyes blinking very rapidly, and D. said: He is fighting person, you see.

If they caught the soldier who planted that mine, what would he say to him?

He want to talk with that Burmese. He want to say: You make my life trouble. If you became like me, what would you want to do with your life?

And I thought: losses and sacrifices, fear and labor and struggle without cease, that is the real story here. If the ends ever do justify the means, then surely these people have the right to sell opium or heroin or anything they please. If I had to lead my family to poverty-ridden exile hedged in by Alien Certificates, I would do the same. —Karen irregulars were jumping out of pickup trucks, carrying small daypacks; they were young, strong and hardened-looking; and a skinny man in spectacles sat under a thatched roof, and D. whispered in awe: He is a head general something. He have busy to do. —But a moment later she said: Most of the soldier is unhappy. Even captain don't have enough food. But what can they do?

THE DRIVER TALKS

By now I had begun to get discouraged about meeting any Opium Kings or opium armies, and even optimistic D. had begun to say: Bill, I so sad for you! Because maybe no success for your project, and then magazine give you angry! —The driver, hard-eyed and blinking, sucked in his smooth cheeks and lowered his voice when D. appealed to him. He was a stubborn greedy man. The bus to Mr. T.'s village cost only ten baht, and we were paying him 1,100 baht a day. It would be easy to believe this a waste of money, but one thing I have learned about Asia is that the more money you pay, the better a person you are thought to be. I remember reading in Norse sagas how a man who had just lost a beloved wife or child could be comforted, indeed made entirely happy again, upon receipt of a sufficient quantity of the "good red gold." So in this case it was my hope that the driver, who was playing hooky from his regular government job in order to make the most of me for as long as I lasted, might by now have tender feelings for me in his heart. Having told him to pick up anybody who was walking our way, I had seen him bypass Burmese out of fear that the police might fire him. Each day I had heard him say: I am only driver! I know nothing. —Now it was time to put on the screws.

He was gripping the doorjamb with his long reddish fingers; now, as usual, working himself into a state of excitement, laughing and babbling in his fear and anger, the 45° creases which descended from the corners of his eyes tightening and throbbing; but D. was wonderful with him, and slowly his face relaxed into thoughtful anxiety and sadness.

Just now he say he know everything about the heroin, said D., but he cannot, because we are new to him and he so afraid.

Tell him we want to let people in American see why everyone does this. Tell him I think the war on drugs is stupid and wrong. I want only to help the people, not steal their secrets.

Then the driver talked.

Most of it come from the Khun Sa, he said. And they have like Bai's husband, who they pay to carry the thing from here to Chiang Mai, from here to Chiang Rai, but difficult to know the way. In the black market near Huey Phonng so many thing from the Khun Sa area, and they pay some people to carry, and when they meet some people they just kill even Thai soldier. In the night they don't care who they kill.

He drove us past a prosperous grocery store.

The owner this place get richest after only seven years although he never put any money in bank, and police cannot do anything.

He drove us to another place.

This house, they come about five years ago, the policewoman from Bangkok. She stay for about five year, like cooking, cleaning for small money, like stupid country girl. It take five year to know everything. But one night she catch him in

the heroin business. Now is in prison in Bangkok.

He drove us to another place.

This house, he have many car go to Khun Sa area.

Another grocery store. (A Li-So woman smiled with black teeth.)

This place he think heroin business, said D. Before was so poor. Never go to bank. The government know but cannot do anything because must send some spy and take time, you know.³⁰

Gesticulating and smoking a long green cigarette that was even skinnier than one of his fingers, the driver took us down to the river where it was already twilight and the water flowed to Myanmar, and the driver spoke in a whisper, saying that heroin came in by boat at night, that this place was very dangerous. Then he made an important revelation. He whispered that Mr. T. was a big heroin king for the Karen, and that Mr. T.'s wife was the brains behind the operation. Suddenly there was new meaning in what D. had said about Mr. T. when we visited the Karen village: Just now he do for some business. He always help him, million and million. They respect him.

And I thought: Yeah, I guess they would.

For that matter, I respected Mr. T., too. I had expected that the driver would know things because every morning he parked himself below the mountains at the market's edge, between the waiting tuktuks and the yellow Toyota and Isuzu trucks which doubled as buses, and facing the line of business-eyed benchwarmers in the awning's shadow; it would violate every natural law for him now to see things. I'd observed him running his bulging greedy eyes over a bus rolling in from the border, the wind playing with the skirts of the ladies who sat with their sandals braced rigidly apart, bales of vegetables in market baskets, plastic bags of Burmese cheroots, and the driver's eyes seemed to go under the towels that some people wore around their necks for scarves; his eyes seemed to count every goosebump on these brown arms folded against the mountain breeze; here was a man who had information, and now at last I was getting some of it. The only question was: Could I use it or would I never get to see anything to back it up?

The driver took us to a hot dry Tai-Yai village of substantial wooden houses, called Gung Mai whose head (of village?) leaned back in his big chair on his shady porch (all his chairs were expensive, carved with floral designs from Chiang Mai) and picked at his denim pants.

And then when he become head of village the opium business finished, D. translated.

The head of village clenched a fist a little but shook his head quite tranquilly while his wife sat in the shadow just inside the doorway on the shining clean wooden floor, expectorating something black into a stained bowl; she had narrow suspicious eyes.

So there is no opium, in your village at all? I said.

He say no. (He had been the head of village of ten years. His smile showed that he could weather our storm).

And where do they sell it now?

Sop Hang village is a good place. Nai Soi village is a good place. Nai Soi village was the Karen town that Mr. T. had taken us to. Everyone there, or course, had said that they didn't have any hand in the opium business. No doubt if I had asked them there they would have recommended Gung Mai village.

What do you think about Khun Sa? I said. The head of Gung Mai Village continued to smile, but his fingers began to twitch. —He never know him.

Well, what do you hear about him? He ever see on TV about Khun Sa. Khun Sa talk for the true way, like a fighting man. Last month TV show in December about heroin business Khun Sa talk about it: If I doesn't business heroin I don't have money to support my citizen any more.

As we left the village, passing a young woman who squatted under a raised porch, stirring a post and smiling at us, the driver said: This man is so big in the heroin business. Not yet a stupid person, you know. And he say to me: Why you come with the news people to disturb my business?

The driver took us to Mae Songa village whose narrow dirt lanes ran between bamboo fences and high jungle trees, and the driver's friend, a fat girl in a motorcycle helmet, whispered: All of the people here, they keep together in the business. Dangerous for us. We cannot tell you the true way.

And I knew that she was right, and I knew that the driver had done his best. Now it was up to D. and me to get help from Mr. T.

YOU CAN BELIEVE IN ME

Mr. T. and his wife were always so friendly and welcoming. His wife clasped her hands together and bowed when presenting water. They had a daughter of about ten whom I saw so many times nestling lovingly against her father's shoulder; he smiled and patted her buttock.

You can believe in me, he said kindly. I spoke to the soldiers about you today. In five or six days I think you can meet with them.

He liked me because I was a commando, he said to D. He liked the fact that I knew a bit about guns.

And now the wife of Mr. T., she like me so much, D. reported, and she want me to buy land near her. Very cheap price: only 100,000 baht one acre. She want us live by her.

I had some business in Phnom Penh, so D. and I took the bus back to Bangkok where D.'s friend, a lady who knew how to get things done, tried calling from various office phones because Khun Sa's people could probably trace any call; and finally the lady who knew how to get things done stopped her silver Mercedes-Benz and

turned on her cellular phone and called the MTA office in Mae Hong Song. It was very eerie to hear her talking with the old man who'd painted the bamboo forest in D.'s notebook. The Klong Toey traffic was already getting thick—speeding motorcycles, mainly, and taxis rolling past cement runways on which old ladies in straw hats sat fixing things; and the lady who knew how to get things done's neck muscles tightened and she hung up and said: The doctor is here in Bangkok!

I want to Phnom Penh and came back half expecting everything to be sewn up, but the doctor never called back, so D. and I took the long slow bus back to Mae Hong Song and then got a bus to bring us to Mr. T.'s village and Mr. T.'s wife said casually: Khun Sa he treat me like daughter, because I do big business his province. I can take your letter to him no problem.

AUM RAWLEY

But before we get to Khun Sa at last (a personage whom, incidentally, it had taken a certain aloof French journalist seven years to see; he estimated that it would take me ten), I'd like to talk about the Karen one more time. If these people sell opium at all it is only in a very minimal way, and that is exactly the point. Their homeland, which was sovereign up until Burma declared independence and which Burma does not recognize, lies just south of Shan State, where Khun Sa flourished.³¹—We have bad luck, said Abel Tweed, the Foreign Minister of the Karenni government in exile (or one of the governments in exile, I should say; his party, as I've mentioned, was the KNPP) as we sat in that safehouse with the gilded platform for Buddhist rites empty because so many of the KNPP Karenni die Christian,³² and on the wall three dog-eared maps of the region, and Abel Tweed was saying: We have bad luck, because Karenni State is too warm and the opium love so much the cold, and our people do not have the knowledge or the chance.

Maybe that's why you're so poor, I said.

I think Khun Sa's smart, said Tweed. He makes a lot of money. But we do not have any ability to make heroin. And Khun Sa cannot help other people like us; he can help only himself.³³

How long have you been fighting?

Since 1948. And you know we are a subgroup of the Karen. The Karen is only white Karen; they have their Karen National Union. We are the Red Karen, the Karenni. Some of our women are Longnecks. And we are not fighting like the Karen and the Shan, just for economic participation in the regime. We are fighting for independence.

How have you survived so long?

All our people support our cause. And we use whatever arms we can get from the black market. The black market is expensive. Since we are not allowed to run our own economy, we collect a tax from our civilians.

What do you need the most?

We need money, M-16's, light machine guns and rockets. We need food, medicine for malaria, and antibiotics.

And I looked into his pale brown, sharp, alert, tired, intelligent face, so sad and ironic, and I thought: Why don't you sell heroin?

I asked a young Karenni soldier the same thing and he said: Because we are Christian. That business we don't like.³⁴ And what do you think about Khun Sa?

I don't know, said the young soldier, which means: I don't care for him. The young soldier was twenty. He said that he had joined the Karenni Army at fifteen when the Burmese shot his sister. His sister's crime was that she chose not to be raped. She jumped into the Salween River, and so they killed her. The current carried her away. The young soldier's family searched three days for the body, but never found her.

The Burmese were following an anti-insurgency strategy when they killed and raped people. It was based on the mere wasting, burning and razing which went back to ancient times. Cortes had proceeded thus against the Aztecs in the sixteenth century, steadily destroying their capital house by house, burning what he could, pulling down the rest stone by stone, creating a wasteland which his enemies could not use.³⁵ But that was too indiscriminately harsh. One had to refine it slightly, in order to save one's useful pawns. Hence the more refined procedure that the French Revolutionaries had directed against the Chouans in the eighteenth century, the French imperialists against the Algerians in the nineteenth,³⁶ the Mexican federalists against the Zapatistas at the beginning of the twentieth,³⁷ and the Americans against the Vietnamese still later. Ne Win had introduced it in the 1960s, when the Americans were practicing it. He called it the "Four Cuts": cut food, cut funds, cut intelligence, cut recruitment. The way it worked was to surround a small area, order the villagers to move to a place under government control,³⁸ and then act on the assumption that anyone who remained was an enemy deserving of freely applied terror. The Four Cuts proved themselves over the next thirty years as the Burmese steadily drove back the Communists, the Karen, the Karenni and the Shan. The young soldier's sister was but an object of the Four Cuts. I am sure the young soldier was fully consoled to know that her death had been nothing personal.

It was he who kept D. and me company on the four-wheel drive which grated up the steep jungle road, the Burmese mountains sheer blue blades of fog ahead. At the border pole, the unpleasant Thai soldier with his big black pistol refused to let us through. —Never mind, said the young soldier. We go by the secret way.

The secret way was the other fork of the same dirt road that led to the unpleasant Thai soldier. The other fork had no soldier. It crossed jungle streams and sometimes became a river. From time to time it was obstructed by stacks of bamboo which the four-wheel drive clawed its way over, and the secret way went deeper and deeper into a wilderness of huge leaves and violet flowers. We were still in Thailand. At last

we came to a village, the houses raw wood platforms on stilts, and girls with baskets on their backs. This was the village of Aum Rawley, whom the driver had previously described as head of the Karen (actually, of course, the Karenni), and whom I recognized as being one of the two very old and thin and tendoned men in windbreakers who sat silently watching me during my first interview with Abel Tweed's office. Aum Rawley had just retired in favor of his younger brother, Ta Be Tu, and because he was old and overcautious and no longer had the authority, he would not permit us to go on to the soldiers camp. He thought I was a DEA spook. He kept saying: If I can meet with the DEA, I want to discuss with them how to wipe out opium.

Why?

Because I have seen so many heroin addict. Before they were addict, they were good people. Now cannot depend on them. I know some family, they have money, they have good job, but when their son become heroin addict they go down into destitution. No money, no property.³⁹

He spoke slow, careful English, this tired, grey and balding man with the heavy glasses and the butterfly tattoo, smiling to show his missing teeth. He was incredibly skinny. He sat under a bamboo canopy, mending a child's plastic guitar.

I myself experience some dysentery, he admitted. And I put some opium mix with garlic and warm it in the fire. Then dysentery stop after two or three hours.⁴⁰

A PROMENADE

The next day we prepared for another attempt to cross into insurgent territory. So it was that a dozen years after my first such experience, an idiotic foray into Afghanistan, I found myself once more bound for an illegal border crossing and a strenuous and possibly dangerous mountain promenade of uncertain length, all on a bad stomach. Maybe I should learn something from my stomach, I thought. Maybe I should become a pudgy armchair general.

We came to the checkpoint before Nai Soi and the two Thai soldiers studied us awhile before they let us go through. The young Karenni soldier said: Sometimes I want to go to the battlefield with Thai soldier. Because I think they have only good uniform.

After Nai Soi there was a small high village in a high dry ravine in the jungle. We crossed a wide brook, stone by stone, and began to walk. D., newly pregnant, was tired and miserable. The young soldier and his friend helped her patiently, leading her by the hand higher and higher up the jungle ridge upon which huge scarlet leaves as crunchy as potato chips continually fell. There was a distant green and yellow hall of jungle ahead. At its peak was the border, the young soldier said.

When we were very high in those hazy mountains we emerged from that steeply uptwisting tunnel of bamboo and came into Karenni State (or, as the Burmese would have called, Burma or Myanmar). There was a dip in the jungle to our left

and I heard a baby crying. This was an encampment of Burmese students who had armed themselves to fight alongside the KNU. We ascended another mountain and then went down a dark and muddy path into an ochre-colored village whose houses were floored, walled and roofed with slender bamboo slats now all the color of dirt, with earth-colored logs stacked underneath and immense pigs with ratlike snouts who slowly paced the bare dirt, the sow's udders dragging almost to the ground; these animals were dark like clots of mud, and the people were toned a reddish-brown—everything earth-colored, in short, except for the bone-white chickens, the green bamboo jungle all around, and the red headcloths that the women sometimes wore. Other clothes had started out blue or green, but they were dusted the same hue as the houses now. The people were Karenni refugees. They said that the Burmese soldiers never came here.

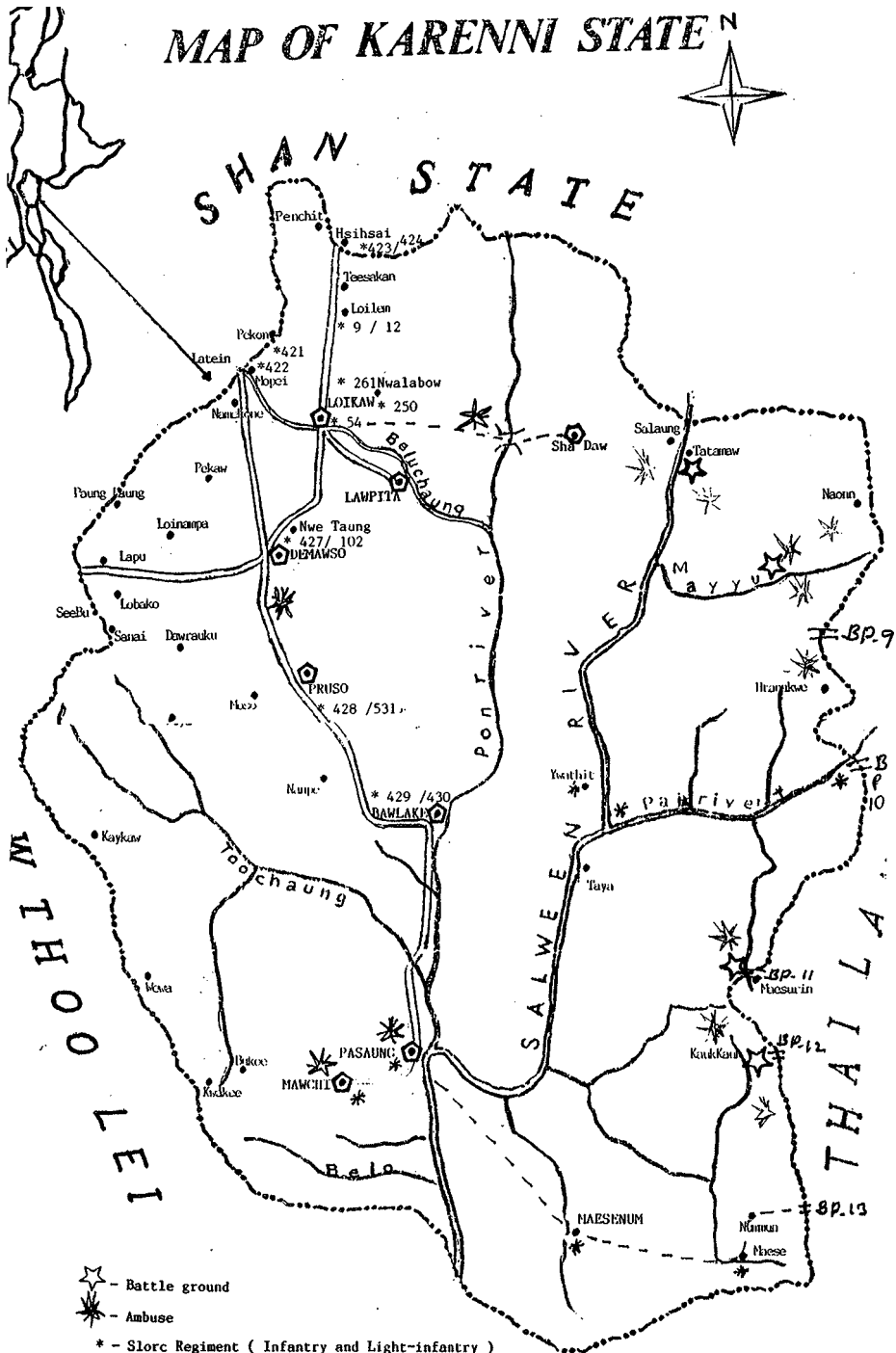
It was late afternoon now. We continued on.

The Caucasian promenader suffers from certain disadvantages on these jaunts. His greater size and bulk make bridge-crossings (the bridges being two or three bamboo poles laid side by side; they're very slippery, they turn and they bend) a graceless and occasionally disastrous activity. He must continually duck his head on these bamboo-ceilinged trails. His big feet don't always know where to put themselves, especially when the pathway is an eroded and coated ribbon of treacherous slipperiness on a steep mountainside. His inability to drink the water from local houses and streams requires him to carry his own, which correspondingly weighs him down, or else to invest in a fragile and expensive filter. He sweats much more in the heat, and gets proportionately more dehydrated.

On the other hand, longer legs and especially the years of superior nutrition do tell. I was able to outwalk the two Karenni soldiers who accompanied me. At the end of that day I maintained my pace when they did not. I am convinced that diet is the key factor. Had I spent a week or two in the Karenni village instead of just a couple of days, I would more than have lost my advantage, as the subsequent trip would prove.

We ascended and descended the next mountain and came to another village under whose house platforms I could sometimes see the bare feet and legs of woman rocking their crying babies, their waist-length blankets cut off by the projecting skeletons of bamboo, and we went on and poor D. could barely put one foot ahead of the other anymore. It grew dark by bounds, a jungle darkness in which sad blackish jewels glittered in the trail's earth in the light of my headlamp; these were spiders and beetles, which stirred and twinkled, trying to understand the light. The young soldier said that there were many ghosts of dead Burmese in this direction. He had seen them at night. I asked him what they looked like, and he said just like in the movies. I shone the lamp ahead, searching for bare dirt in the darkness; that was the trail. Ahead I could only see by means of my cyclopean rings of light a plant like a cobra extended to strike, the pale yellow tendons of bamboo clumps in the

MAP OF KARENNI STATE



- ☆ - Battle ground
- ★ - Ambuse
- * - Slorc Regiment (Infantry and Light-infantry)
- ◻ - Town
- - Village

Furnished by KLA (1994)

darkness, and confused leaves and then more darkness in that night of insects and fangs. I was not in the least hungry. When we stopped for the soldiers to munch dry noodles, I forced myself to eat a licorice drop. I felt strong and fit. We kept on. The soldiers were now going by a way they knew only by hearsay, and they sometimes mistook a fork. I was filled with pity for D. The labor of supporting her somewhat as we wound up and down the dark mountains began to tell a little. It became harder to see, either because the battery of my headlamp was failing or because my eyes were growing strained. My ears were also deceived on occasion. Three of four times I'd think I heard another stream flowing through the wall of bamboo beside us, and yet I could not see any water-shine. Listening more closely, I'd realize that the sound was more akin to that of fixing bacon. Then I'd spy out at last the immense writhing blackness of the snake that was hissing at me—a snake (in my perception at least) as long as a freight train. I would quicken my step and pull D. along, hoping that she hadn't noticed. So we were all happy when an hour or so before midnight we came into the final village where across the table the longish Karenni soldier faces peered at my press passes behind the candle lamp.

WHAT ALL THIS HAS TO DO WITH OPIUM

Morning found us in that abode of 1,000 souls, a village the color of Chinese tea, everything ocher and bamboo and woven, pike mountains all around like the steam from tea. The village was less than a year old. The refugees had come from all over.—The soldiers come to burn our village, our paddy, our house, one man explained. They catch everybody to be porter, every bout, every week, so we cannot work on our farms anymore. And they put explosives around their camp near our village, and that kill many our buffalo, and then they ask from the price of explosive.

Sad, barefooted men with wool caps sat watching the sparks from their Burmese cheroots rain down upon the bare hard earth across which so many dogs and chickens and boys ranged. The girls carried teapots or stood rocking little babies. They existed on Fate's sufferance. It was always possible that the Burmese soldiers could find them out and burn this place, too—which is why I will not reveal its name.

The head of the soldiers gave us breakfast, little more than heaping bowls of rice with a couple of vegetables. Wiry, alert-eyed, with a nose as sharp as a knife, he spoke to D., who translated: He say when the Burmese come, they burn rice, so you cannot eat rice anymore.

He showed photos of other villages and training camps and kept saying: Now nothing. Because Burmese burn already.

(Once the young Karenni soldier had caught a Burmese soldier only twelve years old who was as skinny as a skeleton, and he asked him why he came into Karenni state to hurt people, and the Burmese boy said: Because I have not food, and nothing to do. —And he let the boy go.)⁴¹

You die so poor in this village, I said to a man. Why don't you sell opium like Khun Sa?

Don't like.

After breakfast the head of the soldiers took us up to a plateau of dead cropped grass surrounded by jungle mountains where he ran his training camp. A hundred and fifty or so soldiers in dark green uniforms were drilling, swinging their arms, counting in Karenni, splitting into two independent rows, then joining again. This was ten percent of the total Karenni fighting force. They were all volunteers. I thought of the young soldier, who refused to marry because he planned to keep fighting until the Burmese withdrew or until he died, whichever came first, and he thought he knew which would come first, and I wondered how many of these recruits were doomed. When I got closer to them I saw that many were very very young, fourteen or less. —We have 158 soldiers, an officer said. A hundred and twenty-five of them have no hat. In the hot sun it is very difficult for them...

What do they need the most?

The most? Oh, so many things—medicine for malaria, hat, food, I don't know ...

The soldiers were eating lunch now, bowls of rice with nothing in it, and they are standing or squatting in the hot sun. I had the officer ask the nearest one what he needed the most.

Milk and sugar, the boy said. Because we are so weak... When D. and I got back to Mae Hong Song, we sent them all the milk and sugar we could afford, wondering how much the Thai border guards would skim off in "taxes" (they took ten baht for every sack of rice) and I thought of the hospital in that village, a wretched hut with no medicine, and I stared again at the simple glaring reason: No opium. I had D. pull from her notebook a preserved opium poppy from Bai's village and all the soldiers looked blank; they didn't even know what it was.

ANOTHER PROMENADE, THIS TIME ON HORSEBACK

Passing Bai at the market (she was getting ready to take the bus to Bangkok for Chinese New Year because that was the one time she was allowed to visit her husband), passing the beautiful Li-So girl whose brother-in-law was doing five years for opium (yes, they grow opium in our village, she'd lied, but just to smoke, not yet to sell), we caught a tukruk and went to Mr. T.'s village. Mr. T.'s wife had actually gone to Opium City (which is called Ho Mong)⁴² and gotten permission for us to visit! I thought of the French journalist who'd had to wait seven years, and gloated.⁴³

Mr. T.'s wife thought that we were very rich. We'd given out that D. and I were married. She wanted us to give her a ticket to America, where she and Mr. T. and their daughter could stay indefinitely in our mansion. —Mr. T. can do anything, she said. He can be a driver, a taxi driver... D., who'd stayed with her one night while I continued on in Karenni State, said that the food they cooked was meager and

poor. And I was sad for that family from the bottom of my heart, and thought again of the plaint of the all the opium sellers: But what can we do?

So we drove back to the MTA office where the old man sat at the round table painting Chinese New Year's messages on long narrow slips of red paper which he had already carefully folded into squares, each of which was already x-folded, and he poised the calligraphy brush over the paper, thinking, before he made the bold black Chinese strokes with this rich matte blackness of sumi and hung each strip out to dry across the low concrete wall. He took the letter that Mr. T.'s wife had brought, and opened it. It was written in a mixture of four languages and contained a code word. He nodded as he read.

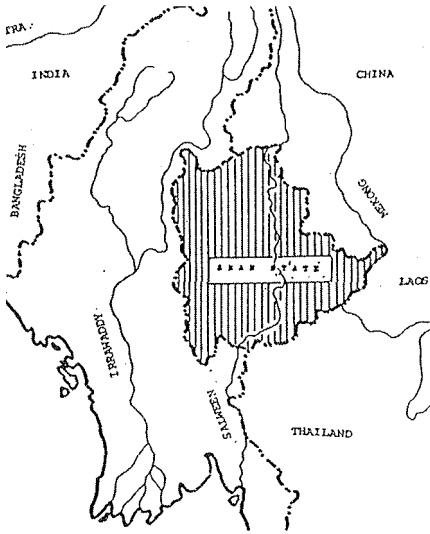
This time we were given visa applications for the Shan State People's Republic, and I saw even at that early stage that there was more business sense involved here than for Karenni State because they charged a 500-baht processing fee. Then a pick-up truck drove us into the mountains for an hour along a road we'd never traveled before, and after paying another fee we found ourselves in another office with more wooden heads of animals, and posters of trees and flowers, and yellow Chinese banners. The people were not Tai-Yai, but Chinese like Khun Sa himself.⁴⁴ Hot green mountains shot upon all sides. A little girl crossed the hot and dusty courtyard carrying a plastic cooler. It was very quiet.⁴⁵

This time the crossing was by horse, and at first we both found it pleasant and easy. The path was almost level (or rather its upward slope was exceedingly gentle), and the jungle was lovely—moister and more humid just like my impression of Shan State. Presently the way steepened, and it grew dark. That was when it began to get a little unpleasant. I don't want to make a big thing of it, because two European journalists we met in Ho Mong had walked it without a thought (I walked back myself), but the darkness was a problem. I lost a few disagreements with my horse, which resulted in some cuts and bruises which became annoying abscesses, and D., although she was not herself thrown, suffered such violent uterine pains that her doctor later advised her to get an abortion. We came to the border at last, and I saw stars far below me on both sides, and then a sign with a red skull and crossbones that said DANGER AREA. My horse lurched down the dark mountain head first, sometimes stumbling; I held on as best I could with my bleeding fingers, and bamboo shoots and pricklers struck me in the face. I already had an infected arm from Karenni State that burned like fire, and my new cuts glowed in the cold.

Then at last we came to a chilly, dismal flat place like the moon, and at no great distance I heard bells. Flashing my light, I saw the eyes of many cows gleam silvery like vampires'. More barbed wire, and then a village of dirt-floored houses where we smoked cigarettes by candlelight.

The truck that was sent to fetch us resembled a garbage truck. It was quite high off the ground, and its flatbed was full of tall cans. I never found out what was in them.

The MTA soldier played a rap music tape and we wound slowly on a dirt road into the yellow mountain, nothing but space and jungle at our left hand. We came to the first checkpoint, where a uniformed boy with a submachine gun arose from his smoky fire, inspected the handwritten pass, and raised the bamboo pole, and D. explained in awe: This is soldier of *bim!*



Locator map of Shan State

Palm trees grew out of the wall of dirt.

The driver said that he got only two meals a day—mainly rice with vegetables, but sometimes meat. This was the general theme of the Shan State People's Republic, everything meager, but still much better than in the secret Karenni village. The people of Khun Sa did have roads; some had vehicles; the hospital in Ho Mong, where we were going, was not impressive by American standards but it did have an x-ray machine, whereas the hospital in the Karenni village was a palm-roofed hut with no medicine. Khun Sa had endowed the hospital himself. He paid the doctors and gave them houses. (Lieutenant-Colonel James "Bo" Gritz, a highly deco-

rated Green Beret who had visited Khun Sa several times,⁴⁶ told me in October 1994: The Shan have shown themselves to be effective. Khun Sa starts his boys out at about age nine. They're fanatics like the Hitler-Jugend. They learn nothing but loyalty to Khun Sa. They would die for him, I believe. You can't say that for the Karenni or the Kachin or the others. Without Khun Sa there is no Shan State. I like Khun Sa. He sure has improved things over there.)

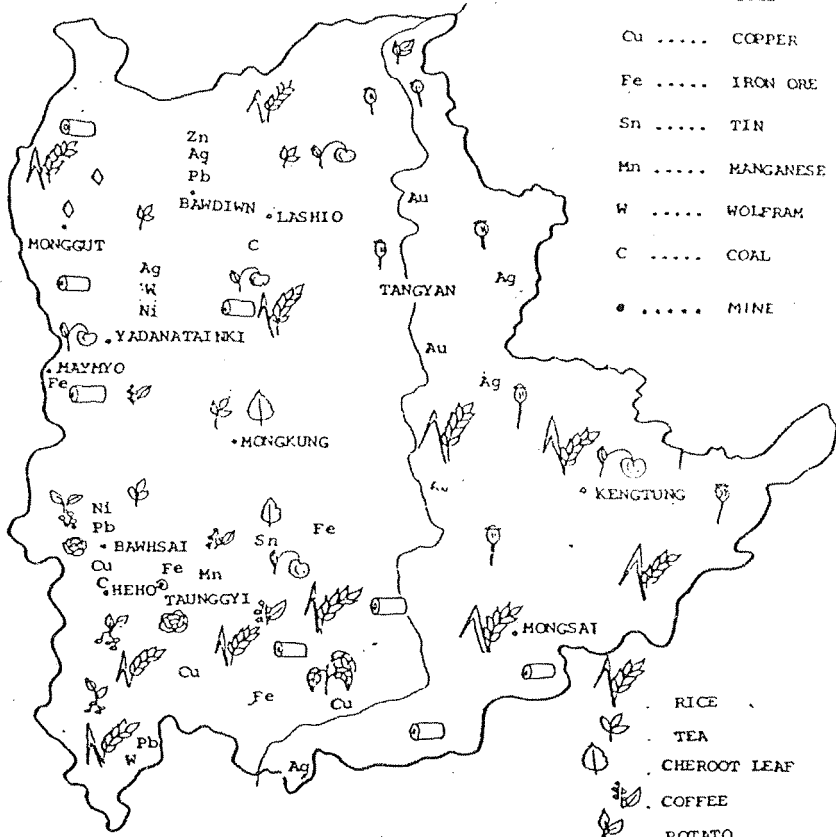
After an hour we came to a second checkpoint and were asked to change vehicles. We were sorry to see the last of our truck driver. The soldiers who took his place were grim and silent men. D. and I sat on sacks of charcoal in the back of their pickup and we came into Ho Mong at last. I glimpsed a sign that said MTA CROP SUBSTITUTION INSTITUTE.⁴⁷

As we drove through the town that Chinese New Year's Eve, I gradually became awed at the size of the place.⁴⁸ I don't know what I expected, but it was vastly larger than the Karenni village; it was even bigger than Ban Rak Tai—an interesting comparison, since Rak Tai, you'll recall, had been KMT, and the KMT were numbered among Khun Sa's enemies. The KMT had held Ho Mong until 1985, when the MTA had driven them out. (That was when they planted their mines and closed the way to Rak Tai.)⁴⁹—The KMT is finished, our liaison officer said with satisfaction.

As for Ho Mong, the dark streets seemed to go on and on. We passed the tin-

MINERALS AND VEGETATION

- Ag SILVER
- Pb LEAD
- Zn ZINC
- Au GOLD
- Cu COPPER
- Fe IRON ORE
- Sn TIN
- Mn MANGANESE
- W WOLFRAM
- C COAL
- MINE



- RICE
- TEA
- CHEROORT LEAF
- COFFEE
- POTATO
- VEGETABLE
- TOBACCO
- TEAK
- OPIUM

Resource map of Shan State

seled Christmas tree lights of a karaoke place, and then began to see soldiers walking down the sides of that long unlighted road. The houses(?) were also lightless at first, but then we saw a row of streetlamps and I was even more amazed and we kept going and saw more houses, some candle-lit, some dark, and finally came to a barracks-like building where the soldiers gestured to us to enter. I wish I could describe to you the thrill of being in that place which I was one of the first Americans ever to see, this weird, secret place which Khun Sa had built. Had I not been with D. I could never have seen it. The driver of the first truck had said to D.: You husband American? Why they let him in? You know DEA pay big money to kill Khun Sa. I stay here four years, and first year never allowed to look at Khun Sa's face when he go past! And Americans I never see here! —So I was pretty pleased. The scope of what D. had for me had just dawned; maybe I had what journalists call a "scoop."

We thanked the soldiers for the lift and they said never mind. A small boy and a beautiful young woman in red, perhaps his mother, greeted us with reserved smiles. The girl lit a candle for us and showed us to our room, which had three beds with mosquito nets and plank walls above a cement base. The room had no windows. The girl pulled the door softly shut after her.

Do you think I can look outside? I asked D.

Maybe big trouble for you, she said, shocked. Because this is control area!

I went to the bathroom, where there was another door. I unbolted it and looked out at Ho Mong. The girl in red stood there holding a candle high, watching me. When she saw me gazing at her, she blew the candle out but continued to stare at me.

I tried to be a good boy, but curiosity finally got me. I opened the front door, almost expecting to see a guard, but instead I faced only emptiness so utterly cold and dark that it resembled a concrete wall painted black. That was when I finally began to acknowledge that Ho Mong was no totalitarian prison camp. I closed the door and went to bed.

New Year's Day dawned foggy and cold, after a long night whose rats(?) gnawed away at food and sleep. Outside, the street was greyish-blue and closed-in like a dead man's face. At 7:00 a.m. the roosters had stopped crowing and many Chinese-looking people, the girls with long inky pigtails began to appear on the street. Then the sun rose over the hazy jungle. Going around the corner, I saw crowds standing or squatting quietly, buying or selling vegetables. There was a muted quality about the place. A soldier had said that Khun Sa was getting old, that other Chinese were muscling in on his business, that the town was experiencing a slump: I don't know whether that was true or not, and I thought it better not to ask. (The Opium King definitely preserved some power. A year later, even as the Burmese military announced that their next target would be Khun Sa, a Thai prosecutor requested that nine Khun Sa men be detained for smuggling more than a kilo of heroin into the U.S. The request was denied.)⁵⁰ One thing I must emphasize again—that while I did see poverty and sadness in Ho Mong, I've also seen them in Mae Hong Song

or San Francisco. The people were afraid of me because I was American. They loved Khun Sa. There was no question about it.

At about 9:00 our liaison officer found us. His name was Khun Sai. He had large spectacles and wore a grey French coat. His English was perfect, and accorded well with his round, alert, Shan-Chinese face, which I suspected could be ruthless if it needed to be; he also spoke perfect Thai, and as D. spoke with him it slowly warmed into friendliness.

I joined the movement when I was twenty-one, he said. I'm forty-five now. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't live unless I joined.

When does the end justify the means? I said. This was of course the central issue of this story, and I would ask Khun Sa the same thing.

It has some limits, of course, the liaison officer said. (He was a former Maoist.)⁵¹ We don't like the means we use, but we have no other choice.

In the liaison office I saw photos of the King and Queen of Thailand. Later Khun Sa would ask D., who knew the Princess a little, to obtain a pair of her shoes so that he could stud it with gems.

What do you think about the Thai government? I said.

I think they want to help us, but they can't, the liaison officer said. The DEA put pressure on them.⁵² But the Thais give us the facilities we need. You like Mae Hong Song?

Not so much. I like it here very much. I feel safe here.

How close are the Burmese to this place?

They're across the Salween River, but they cannot come here. They tried to come here a month ago; of course their boats were sunk and many drowned, and they had to pull back.

The man's confidence contrasted ringingly with the powerlessness I sensed in the Karenni camp. He seemed so strong and secure.

So how would you characterize your ideology?

Nationalism plus democracy. But nationalism comes first. Only we have to be careful that it doesn't turn into racism.

INTERVIEW WITH KHUN SA

D. and I sat looking down into the jungle-studded arid bowl called Ho Mong, with here and there a Shan State flag flying. Columns of white dust rose up like smoke. Ho Mong went on and on, a long town between jungle ridges and chalky hills.⁵³

You'd better change your clothes, the liaison officer said. The General has come to see you.

I looked where he pointed, and saw an honor guard of soldiers with sub-machine guns.

D. and I rushed down to the place where Khun Sa sat. He wore shiny black

shoes. His serene face nodded slowly as he spoke in his deep calm voice, all around him soldiers with guns pointed outward. I felt a surge of awe as I looked at him.

Sit down, he said.

The two European journalists who had been to Ho Mong before followed us leisurely, not so impressed. Those two men had the run of the place. The liaison officer liked them and knew them well. (He was considerably cooler to me.) One of them—the journalist, I think, not the photographer—had made a point of saying to the liaison officer when the USA came up in conversation: *Those fucking DEA bastards!* and then apologizing to me privately. This had struck me as a spineless. But for all that he was a man of great knowledge and experience, who shared what he knew with me. He had been to Wa State and back, a two-week walk each way, and it was very interesting to listen to him and imagine what it would have been like for me if Ta Khun Mong had found his friend. This journalist said that Khun Sa had been at his peak five years ago. He said that these days Khun Sa's power probably extended no further than Chiang Mai.³⁴ But he also said that the more he found out about opium and the hill tribes, the more he realized he didn't know; and I could certainly appreciate that. He and his colleague had come to Ho Mong only to update their video now that various insurgent groups were actually responding to the Burmese peace feelers at last; some Karenni had signed on, as I'd heard, and an army of Kachin guerrillas were considering taking the plunge. So that was why the two journalists were here. They hoped to go to the front to view some shelling. —After all, they said to me, there's very little to see in Ho Mong. A day is enough. —They asked if this would be possible, and the Opium King replied dryly: Certainly. If you're not afraid to die. —But when they heard that it might take more than a day to get there and back, they demurred. It was not so important to put shelling in their video, and anyhow they had seen shelling before.

To me, however, the strangeness of the place continued to echo with almost derisive eeriness. I was quite ill and feverish; no doubt that accounts for some of it; but I also had my unstaled memories of the Karenni with their dirty feeble soldier-boys eating nothing but rice, their refugees building new houses in the jungle only to wonder when the Burmese would find them again, their unanswered letter to President Clinton begging for help. This place felt safe. Then, too, there were Khun Sa's eyes. —Oh, he's charming, the woman in Bangkok who could arrange everything had explained. But that means nothing. —Well, what are you saying? I'd demanded. Are you saying he's good or bad? Should he be assassinated? —She hesitated. He's not good or bad, she replied at last with an impatient move of her wrist. —I looked into his eyes, and already I felt that he was a good man. Then I wasn't sure. I believed that in the course of business he must have done ugly, ruthless, evil things (or else his soldiers had done them for him, which is the same thing; one man in Ho Mong had told D. and me that Khun Sa was very good, but his lieutenants, the Chinese "big soldiers" were very greedy and cruel; there were

reports of the MTA's impressing porters and terrorizing villagers just as SLORC did, although on a much smaller scale),⁵⁵ but I looked into Khun Sa's face again as he sat there beneath the flag of crossed rifles and I believed him a good man.

The fact that I have any opinion at all about Khun Sa worries me. A negative view would play into the hands of the anti-drug self-server and fascists. A positive view might imply that I was duped by him (one has only to recollect the Communist intellectuals of the 1920s and 30s who visited Russia without perceiving any of Stalin's crimes.⁵⁶ As Churchill remarked, "There is no doubt that Hitler had a power of fascinating men, and the sense of force and authority is apt to assert itself unduly upon the tourist.")⁵⁷ Even a neutral view could be criticized.⁵⁸ But I had come from Rangoon only that autumn. I remember Rangoon—oh, I remember it well. I remember waiting in a hot narrow cafe full of steamy music with the chorus going uh-aah and a martial drumbeat, the men sitting barefooted and saronged at tippy tables of Pepsi and teapots and hot sauce, talking in pairs, their cigarettes upraised; and cockroaches moved lazily down the greasy walls while the waitress stood rereading *The New Light of Myanmar*, which like all Burmese publications was required to print at least three slogans in each issue. The slogans in this one were: Khanti ca, patience; this is the way to auspiciousness and Emergence of the State Constitution is the duty of all citizens of Myanmar Naing-Ngan and The Tatmadaw has been sacrificing much of its blood and sweat to prevent disintegration of the Union. All nationalities of the Union are urged to give all co-operation and assistance in this great task. The Tatmadaw was the army, about whose sacrifice of blood and sweat my Burmese interpreter had said: And those students in '88, we saw them shot right in front of our flat, on this street. We could not help them. We could only watch. It was so pitiful. Anyone who went down to help them, the soldiers chased them and shot at them also. —The headline in that night's *New Light* was: State Law and Order Restoration Council Chairman Senior General Than Shwe sends felicitations to Vietnam and *New Light*'s TV schedule began with Martial Music, followed by Songs on Patriotism, followed by Song Variety, while the radio schedule began with News, followed by Slogans, followed by Music Now to Nine, followed by News, followed by Slogans, followed by Lunchtime Music. The waitress stood rereading this in her place behind the counter's glass shelves of stale and rancid pastries.

At last the interpreter came back and said: I met with the manager, and there was a little problem. You see, sir, at night there is many informers. If a Burmese goes up to this apartment they don't care, but if a foreigner goes and they see, then they ask the girl: Who were you with? and if she cannot answer it's a big problem for her—not for me, not for you. They take her to prison.

How long? Three months? Five years?

I don't know, sir, he said, looking down at his hands. You see, sir, there is no law. These words made me shiver, and I said nothing.

And this was Rangoon, mind you; this was how the Burmese government treated Burmese.⁵⁹ As for how they treated the Shan, the Karenni, the Kachin, the Wa, the Li Su and all the other minorities, I think you have some inkling by now. In 1992, they expelled 250,000 Rohingya Muslims from the northwest; in one refugee camp with a population of 20,000, every single woman claimed to have been gang-banged by Burmese troops.⁶⁰ It has been estimated that the many local wars between the various Burmese governments and ethnic insurgents have cost 10,000 lives a year for the past forty years.⁶¹ The magnitude and duration of these casualties is sufficient indictment, for, at the very least, a successful government would not allow this to go on decade after decade.

So I looked at Khun Sa, also known as Chiang Si-Fu or Lo Hsing-Han, depending on which newspaper one read,⁶² old and stocky and tired, sitting cross-legged on the bench; and based on the little I knew about him and the options he had, I judged him a hero of sorts. How much had he actually done? How many Shan movements and militants did he represent? One scholar of Burmese history, specifically dismissing any potential on Khun Sa's part to meld Shan resistance groups into a larger entity, wrote firmly, *a united Shan independence movement remains very much a pipe-dream*.⁶³ The Burmese insurgent Aye Saung, who at the end of the 1970s joined a rival Shan movement, the Shan State Army, considered Khun Sa a mere opium warlord. Rather condescendingly he describes in his memoirs how Khun Sa's men fled when the SSA came to Ho Mong.⁶⁴ Khun Sa would have the last laugh, for much of the SSA had amalgamated with the MTA a few years later, and it was certainly Khun Sa who controlled Ho Mong in 1994. Was his political influence merely local and remote? I didn't know. Were his principles expedient rather than statesmanlike? I don't know. I'd heard that the Karen, the Karenni and the Pao had ostracized him. The Karen National Union had on its books a sentence of death against opium traffickers. Khun Sa, like the Karen "big general," Bo Mya, had once been an official of one of the local Burmese militias—what some would call a collaborator. These bodies the coiners of the pipe dreams epithet called *particularly notorious... (they) did much to take the steam out of the fast-rising Shan separatist movement*.⁶⁵ This book unfortunately was not known to me until after I had met Khun Sa, and so I was not able to ask him about his militia connections. In a way they were irrelevant, for Bo Mya was now giving his people hope, and the same went for Khun Sa; I had heard myriads bless their names. Hope? SLORC and the DEA certainly weren't supplying that commodity. The history of Burma over the last half-century is the history of unjust, incompetent or remote governments, and of insurgencies which simultaneously multiplied and divided, wounding themselves in bitter schisms. It is a story of people so thoroughly preoccupied with their narrow ethnic interests and with their perfectly justified fears of China, England, East Pakistan, the CIA, and above all the successive Burmese regimes that they rarely succeeded in understanding each other, let alone reaching out to each other. Thanks to her eloquence, her



THE GOVERNMENT OF KARENNI

NOVEMBER 12, 1993

Honorable Paul Simon
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator,

I do appreciate the time you have given to us, this past Monday. I understand that you have any urgent issues on the table, but please do not forget our plight. We will also as you have advised contact your staff, for a future meeting, so we can express our plight in more detail.

We the Karenni have maintained ourselves for several centuries in our territory. The British tried and failed to incorporate us into British ruled Burma. The Burmese attempted to subjugate us under the rule by the succession of post colonial regimes including the current one called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The SLORC is particularly gruesome:

- (1) It failed to relinquish power when the people of Burma overwhelmingly voted for the opposition in May 1990;
- (2) It has imprisoned many of the opposition leaders including Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, many of whom have been killed or severely tortured;
- (3) It has carried out a brutal war against our defenders violating every principle of humanitarian law set out in the Geneva Convention and other international instruments, including enslavement of civilians as porters for their army, torturing and killing our combatants that they capture, and carrying out military operations against our civilian population and communities as well as forcible relocation of them;
- (4) It has carried out systematic atrocities against ethnic nationalities in Burma and indeed against the Burmese themselves who oppose it.

The SLORC regime is attempting to deprive us of our sovereignty, a right granted us in the Burmese Constitution of 1947.

Plea to U.S. for recognition of Karenni independence

family name and her suffering, Aung San Kyu Kii was built up by the west at the end of the 1980s, but not even she could have unified Burma. In the context of this great failure of faith, made up of myriad expedient betrayals and worse, from governmental lurches toward "socialism" and back again to the multiple fissionings of the Karen liberation movement, to the incestuous executions of the Burmese Communist Party, in which one son liquidated his father, and women dipped their clothes gleefully in the blood of the murdered, the failure of Khun Sa to command a wider allegiance or adhere to a consistent "line" is less blameworthy than symptomatic. One can, if one likes, apply Thucydides's description of the ancient Greek pirate-leaders: "powerful men, acting both out of self-interest and in order to support the weak among their own people."⁶⁶ (Khun Sa did own a magnificent house. He had had a nice villa in his previous zone in Thailand, too. As he said in one of his speeches: If we are to get all the blame, it is just as well that we get all the money and glory, too.)⁶⁷ My friend Elizabeth Willett, unimpressed by my account, was harsher than Thucydides, and compared Khun Sa with the tobacco company R.J. Reynolds. Both had to make a living, she said. Both sell addictive poisons. Elizabeth disapproved of both. But here is the difference. I cannot imagine the executives at RJR saying: But what can we do? —Or, rather, I can imagine them saying it, but these individuals do have other jobs they could take and other things they could sell. I thought to myself: The Opium King's minions do not. They cannot go anywhere else; nor should they be required to leave their homeland. And to stay where they are, they must have guns. What matters here is not merely who benefits from the sale, but the circumstances of the benefitter; just as the circumstances of a pistol's use determine whether it is murder or self-defense.

One of the two other journalists asked for his current views on the Wa.

The Wa have their own state, Khun Sa said. Before that they were tricked into fighting us. But they are sure to join us. I am ashamed that we have been fighting each other for the past four or five years.⁶⁸

Haven't they signed an agreement with the Burmese?

The Burmese are very clever people. No doubt the Wa are building many bonfires [to burn their opium]. But there are many people who are growing poppies in Burma's controlled areas, and the Burmese have done nothing to stop *them*. As for the Wa, the Burmese will pressure them until they have no choice but to join us.⁶⁹

And what about your current military situation? the journalist wanted to know. Aren't you in danger of being isolated as a result of the peace talks between the Burmese and the other ethnic groups?

You see, I'm confined to this small environment because of the Burmese offensive. —The Opium King smiled, leaning forward on the bench and working his toes. But why aren't they attacking me yet?

But they are attacking you now! said the journalist rudely.

They cannot push any further, said Khun Sa. And we cannot be pushed any-

more. They are only ten percent of our strength in this area. Since the beginning of the offensive, they have shelled us more than 150 times. For the past two weeks there has been no shelling. But who knows? Since December 1st we haven't any killed or wounded. But on the Burmese side it's thirty to fifty killed and wounded. We went behind the lines and shot them.

Is it true that your business is declining?

I haven't seen any change in business. Last night you saw us celebrating [New Year's Eve]. By the way, those are the people who broke the offensive.

The journalist asked him if he would ever sign a peace accord with the Burmese.

This is legally our country, said Khun Sa quietly. According to the Panglong Accord⁷⁰ we should have been independent more than thirty years ago.

When does the end justify the means? I asked him.

Khun Sa nodded, clasping his hands. His round head seemed too heavy for him. His eyes were narrow and thoughtful.

As for me, he replied, first of all, you must have right and just aims. You must have the right aims, and policies to go along with those aims. If so, you will have success in everything.⁷¹

Does the addict bear 100 percent of the responsibility for himself?

I know drugs are bad for the people, said the old man. And I know they are very dangerous for human well-being. And so, since 1977 I've offered to cooperate with the DEA, but my offers were turned down.⁷² Hired troops were sent in to kill me forty-three times. I do sympathize with the addicts, but also with the growers and traders. Not just one group, but three.

This seemed reasonable to me.⁷³ —If we catch Khun Sa, we have to proceed against him as a criminal, the Governor of Thailand's Yala Province told me a year later. —And yet—the usual irony—when I asked him what would be the best way to address the opium question, his reply was almost the same as Khun Sa's: The crop replacement program must start over there. They must have more education. My idea is the U.S. will try to help the people over there. —The main difference between the Opium King's thinking and that of his enemies was that for the former, the right of the Shan people to self-defense must come first. The individuals who attacked Khun Sa never addressed the issue of what the Shan were supposed to do in the face of state terror.

I have no way, of course, to vouch for the accuracy of the forty-three assassination attempts, but see no reason not to believe that if we can bomb Grenada or Libya or Iraq, we could do some "cowboying" in Ho Mong, too.⁷⁴ As for Khun Sa's offer of cooperation, you will find it at the end of this essay.⁷⁵ I consider it a thoughtful and well-reasoned document. And I must agree with his "not one but three." I have only to think of Bai and her husband to agree with him.

What have you accomplished that you are most proud of? I said.

I lived with my grandfather when I was a kid. When my grandfather died, I made

Dated Panglong, the 12th.
February 1947.

THE PANGLONG AGREEMENT, 1947.

A Conference having been held at Panglong, attended by certain Members of the Executive Council of the Governor of Burma, all Saophas and representatives of the Shan States, the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills :

The Members of the Conference, believing that freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins and the Chins by their immediate co-operation with the Interim Burmese Government :-

The Members of the Conference have accordingly, and without dissentients, agreed as follows :-

1. A Representative of the Hill Peoples, selected by the Governor on the recommendation of representatives of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCUHP), shall be appointed a Counsellor to the Governor to deal with the Frontier Areas.
2. The said Counsellor shall also be appointed a Member of the Governor's Executive Council, without portfolio, and the subject of Frontier Areas brought within the purview of the Executive Council by Constitutional Convention as in the case of Defence and External Affairs. The Counsellor for Frontier Areas shall be given executive authority by similar means.
3. The said Counsellor shall be assisted by two Deputy Counsellors representing races of which he is not a member. While the two Deputy Counsellors should deal in the first instance with the affairs of their respective areas and the Counsellor with all the remaining parts of the Frontier Areas, they should by Constitutional Convention act on the principle of joint responsibility.
4. While the Counsellor, in his capacity of Member of the Executive Council, will be the only representative of the Frontier Areas on the Council, the Deputy Counsellors shall be entitled to attend meetings of the Council when subjects pertaining to the Frontier Areas are discussed.
5. Though the Governor's Executive Council will be augmented as agreed above, it will not operate in respect of the Frontier Areas in any manner which would deprive any portion of these Areas of the autonomy which it now enjoys in internal administration. Full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas is accepted in principle.
6. Though the question of demarcating and establishing a separate Kachin State within a Unified Burma is one which must be relegated for decision by the Constituent Assembly, it is agreed that such a State is desirable. As a first step towards this end, the Counsellor for Frontier Areas and the Deputy Counsellors shall be consulted in the administration of such areas in the Kyitkyina and the Bhamo Districts as are Part II Scheduled Areas under the Government of Burma Act of 1935.
7. Citizens of the Frontier Areas shall enjoy rights and privileges which are regarded as fundamental in democratic countries.
8. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial autonomy now vested in the Federated Shan States.
9. The arrangements accepted in this Agreement are without prejudice to the financial assistance which the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills are entitled to receive from the revenues of Burma, and the Executive Council will examine with the Frontier Areas Counsellor and Deputy Counsellors the feasibility of adopting for the Kachin Hills and the Chin Hills financial arrangements similar to those between Burma and the Federated Shan States.

<u>Shan Committee.</u>	)	<u>Kachin Committee.</u>	)	<u>Burmese Government.</u>
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>
Saopha of Kawngpa State.	)	(Jing New, Kyitkyina))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>)	
Saopha of Yawnghe State.	)	(Zau Rip, Kyitkyina))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>)	
Saopha of North Hsenwi State.	)	(Jinra Tang, Kyitkyina))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>)	
Saopha of Laikha State.	)	(Zau La, Bhamo))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>)	
Saopha of Heng Pawa State.	)	(Zau Lawn, Bhamo))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<i>[Signature]</i>)	
Saopha of Kawngpa State.	)	(Labang Group, Bhamo))	
<i>[Signature]</i>))	
Representative of Kaungthong Saopha.))	
<i>[Signature]</i>	)	<u>Chin Committee.</u>)	

a living by doing business. I have never been cheated once. In all of my work, I have never lost a battle to anyone. If any loss has occurred, it is the result of internal matters. What I am most proud of is that I have done my best to protect my people.

If there are more addicts, he went on, it's not my responsibility; it's the fault of the DEA. If you want to know how heroin comes from Shan State to the U.S., don't ask me, ask the DEA. (Good answer! laughed D. in delight.) If I grow opium and am responsible for it, then the American President and the Thai Prime Minister must be responsible, too. If you have to blame anyone for criminality, then President Bush might be liable.⁷⁶ It was he who sent in planes with defoliant to kill our people and livestock.⁷⁷

Khun Sa answered a few questions from the other two journalists and then the interview was over. He beckoned D. to come and sit beside him. He put his arm around her and patted her hand. She glowed with joy. He knew that she was acquainted with the Princess of Thailand. He wanted to know if he could present her with four pairs of diamond-studded shoes as a token of respect. D., who loved the Princess for her many acts of kindness to the poor, said that she would ask her. —Oh, he is so good, so good! she cried to me later. I am so happy I meet with him! I tell him I want to come here again and bring some medicine from Bangkok to give to his hospital...

That night there was supposed to be a Chinese New Year's festival. D. and I began to walk through the darkness, down the chilly foggy dusty road. The electricity was off. Ahead, the lights of a truckload of MTA soldiers suddenly glowed, illuminating a tree with downgrasping branches like some pale nightmare emblem, and then as the lights came closer they picked out the forms of two soldiers walking in front of us, evidently going dancing with the others. Something about them seemed wrong. They progressed slowly and unevenly. D. and I approached them, and then I saw that each had a wooden leg. They said that mines had unlimbed them—maybe Wa but probably Burmese. They limped along beside us in the darkness for awhile; and I pitied them; from my very bowels I pitied them and their families and Khun Sa himself, pitied everyone who'd had the misfortune to live in that region of poverty and violence where selling opium was one's only chance.

ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS OF FIGHTING UNFINANCED BY OPIUM

From the *Sacramento Bee* final, Saturday, January 28, 1995, page A18:

BURMA REBEL STRONGHOLD FALLS

BANGKOK, THAILAND—In a serious setback for Burma's opposition movement, government troops captured the last rebel stronghold in one of the world's oldest insurgencies Friday. Ethnic Karen rebels said they abandoned their headquarters in the southeast Burma jungle following hours of artillery and small-arms fire by 15,000 Burmese troops. The number of casualties was not known.⁷⁸

EPILOGUE

In 1996 I was en route to Bangkok to try to find Pol Pot when I saw a front page headline on the *Bangkok Post*: KHUN SA SURRENDERS HEADQUARTERS TO RANGOON. I was stunned. The previous year there had been a big offensive against Khun Sa, and I had told D. that I thought that he was finished. But that had played itself out, after which I thought that Khun Sa must be close to invincible. I picked up the paper—I remember that it was one of a stack on the jetway at Narita; in my mind's eye (such was the impression that this news made on me) I can still see that neat pile, and the big headline on the upper lefthand side of the topmost sheet—and I read:

Burmese troops have taken over the headquarters of opium warlord Khun Sa in what some former associates said yesterday signaled his surrender at the end of his career as one of the world's most infamous drug barons... The whereabouts of the 61-year-old Khun Sa were not known... "Khun Sa seems to have reached a secret deal with the Burmese, first to hand over his troops and territory to them, then announce a surrender which would mean that he would be granted an amnesty and live peacefully for the rest of his life," said one veteran Shan nationalist politician. Khun Kyaw Po, until recently an official in Khun Sa's guerrilla organization, told Reuters from northern Thailand: "Khun Sa is making a dirty move at the end of his career by selling the Mong Tai Army to Burma." ... The MTA was the most powerful guerrilla force still fighting the Rangoon government but last June Khun Sa suffered a serious setback when several thousand MTA fighters, led by young Shan nationalists, broke away. Leaders of the breakaway group complained Khun Sa was devoting too much attention to the opium trade and was neglecting Shan political objectives. Last November a dejected Khun Sa officially stepped down as MTA commander saying he had lost heart since the defection.

I thought that it was interesting, in a sadly predictable way, that even now, when the Opium King seemed to have gone down, the *Post* could not bring itself to say a kind word about him. As long as he had stayed in power, he'd been "infamous." Now he was "making a dirty move," evidently out of desperation, because he was "dejected."

And yet I was confused. At that interview he'd implied that he would never open talks with the Burmese—well, come to think of it, he hadn't committed himself one way or the other; he'd simply said that Shan land was Shan land. Had I been mistaken in thinking him a good man instead of the expedient shape-shifter of loyalties which others had portrayed him as?⁷⁹ But who was I to say? No reliable news of the MTA's military situation was available, not would any mass media account of Khun Sa be reliable. I reminded myself of the things that the Burmese had done. Speaking on the need for revolution, Khun Sa had said: If you have your own coun-

try but not your own government, nothing you own is secure. The money you earn is for others to take and squander; the rice you grow is to feed them; the home you build is for them to burn down; your sons are to be press-ganged as their cannon-fodder and porters; and your daughters are to be raped and sold as prostitutes.⁸⁰

This was all accurate. This was what Khun Sa had fought.

Khun Sa simply disappeared, subsequent articles said. He was flown first to Rangoon, then to the Shan State capital of Taunggyi, after which the trail vanished.

D. and I decided to see what we could learn.

THE KARENNI

Mae Hong Son was a cleaner, even more prosperous tourist heaven than before, with many new stores which carried Burmese handicrafts of excellent quality, at only mildly inflated prices: lacquerware boxes from Pagan whose painstaking patternings had a quasi-Islamic flavor, wooden dolls, tins of *thanaka* paste with images of pretty Burmese women on them, and I don't know what all. The fact that it was so easy now for items from Pagan, which lay in SLORC-controlled territory, to come to Mae Hong Son did not bode well for the hill tribes, for it presumably meant that the Burmese government was now able to control the supply routes through the territory of those tribes.⁸¹ Khun Sa's surrender had been a tremendous blow for the Karenni in particular, since once SLORC set up their mortars on Ho Haa hill, Karenni positions lay within the line of fire. I have heard it said more than once that the Thais, who used to provide the KNU with arms at one-half market price in order to keep a buffer state between themselves and SLORC, now had financial agreements with SLORC which permitted them to do great quantities of lucrative and ecologically destructive logging within Burma as a quid pro quo for not helping the Karen or Karenni anymore.⁸² When D. and I went to the KNPP office, we met a one-legged boy (credit due to a Burmese land mine, of course) who sat in the darkened basement in a weary lethargy,⁸³ while upstairs another Karenni soldier fresh out of the jungle said that there had been heavy fighting that day and the previous day. Several Karenni divisions had been routed; they'd had to abandon more positions. They were short of munitions, he said, but maybe they could plan some ambushes, lay some land mines... Abel Tweed was home ill. I had the name of an arms dealer in Trat who was sympathetic to the Karenni and had sold at a loss before to the KNU, so left word for Mr. Tweed to call me if he wanted the address, but he never did; maybe he was too unwell. Saw Maw Reh had died of cancer. Aum Rawley was still alive; he'd grown deaf and testy; his hearing aid itched, he said. He didn't remember D. and me, and kept shouting: But what do you want? —The retreat had rattled him. He paced about the office in grim confusion, and finally left us alone with the boy-soldier, who stared at the wall-map while he talked to us. He gave me the numbers and locations of divisions, but I didn't write them down, not wishing to help the Burmese.

THE SHAN

The MTA office was an even sadder sight. The old man who'd painted the bamboo shoots in D.'s notebook had gone a year ago, his replacement said. Khun Sa was in Bangkok or Chiang Mai. No one knew where the doctor was. —Everybody gone, he said. In Ho Mong the doctors at Khun Sa's hospital had fled the approaching Burmese (who, I'd read in that morning's *Post*, were herding MTA members into barbed wire enclosures and setting them to forced labor—which, they explained, was a Burmese tradition, and unfortunately it was).⁸⁴ I wrote a letter saying that D. and I had flown up from Bangkok especially because we were worried about Khun Sa and wanted to be useful if we could. Could somebody please meet us? The man (a study in dejection, barefoot, supine, with a hood over his face), said that we could come tomorrow at nine.

The next morning at the appointed time we returned to the MTA office, where we met Khun Sa's nephew, Mr. Saeng Fan ("Light of Heaven"), who welcomed us with gentle cordiality. He had very sad eyes.

Why did Khun Sa surrender? I asked.

This is only my opinion, he replied. Mr. K. did what was right in his own heart.

Saeng Fan drew a complex diagram of the power relationships between many countries. His theory was that after Sino-American relations had begun to deteriorate following the Americans' granting a visa to the prime minister of Taiwan, the Chinese were determined to dominate southeast Asia more openly.⁸⁵ Relations with Ne Win were good. The Chinese persuaded him to negotiate with Khun Sa.⁸⁶ If he did so, they said, it would enhance his prestige and prevent the famous dissident Aung San Su Kyii from gaining more power. If Aung San Su Kyii were to "come up" in the world, however, then China might not be able to count on Burmese friendship quite as much. Ne Win needed to act quickly and decisively, the Chinese said, to maintain his stature and to reacquire the territory of Shan State, which lay so close to China proper.

There might have been some truth to this, I thought, or there might not have been. It was plausible. The real question for me was what the Burmese had offered Khun Sa. —Amnesty, probably, as the newspapers said. I knew that the Americans had placed a two million-dollar reward on his head. They were more than annoyed that he seemed to have vanished; I had to laugh.

Where's the doctor now? I asked.

Still in Ho Mong.

And Khun Sai?

Back with his parents. Many MTA retire now.

D. started to cry. —I so sad, she whispered.

Are many MTA angry with Khun Sa? I asked.

Everybody can believe what he wishes, said Saeng Fan quietly. But those of us who believe in Mr. K., we still believe in him.

The *Bangkok Post* said that the Burmese are putting many MTA soldiers to forced labor, I said. Is that true?

When I read the *Bangkok Post* I can only laugh. There is no problem in Ho Mong. These journalists in Bangkok, they stay in air-conditioned hotels and talk on the telephone, but they see nothing. Yet they must mention Mr. K. Mr. K. is their money tree. They shake the tree, shake, shake, get money.

Why don't you help the Karenni? I asked. Now I think the hill tribes must hold hands together, or you'll all be finished.

He opened his notebook and showed me Abel Tweed's private telephone number. —We keep in touch, you see. Sometimes I try to contact him...⁸⁷

A couple of weeks later, when D. and I were in Aranyaprathet, I called the office long distance and got hold of the doctor. —It's been a long time, he said.

Did you get my article? Of course. We liked it very much, he said warmly. He seemed happy to talk to me.

Thank you. And how are you? How is everyone?

We had to surrender for the good of the Shan people, he said wearily. It was a question of doing that or breaking our pots and pans.

And how is Khun Sa?

No problem. Now he's going to be a successful businessman in Rangoon.

And you?

I have a job in Bangkok.

And the MTA?

Finished.

Finished?

Forever. Now we must work with the Burmese.

Are they treating you right?

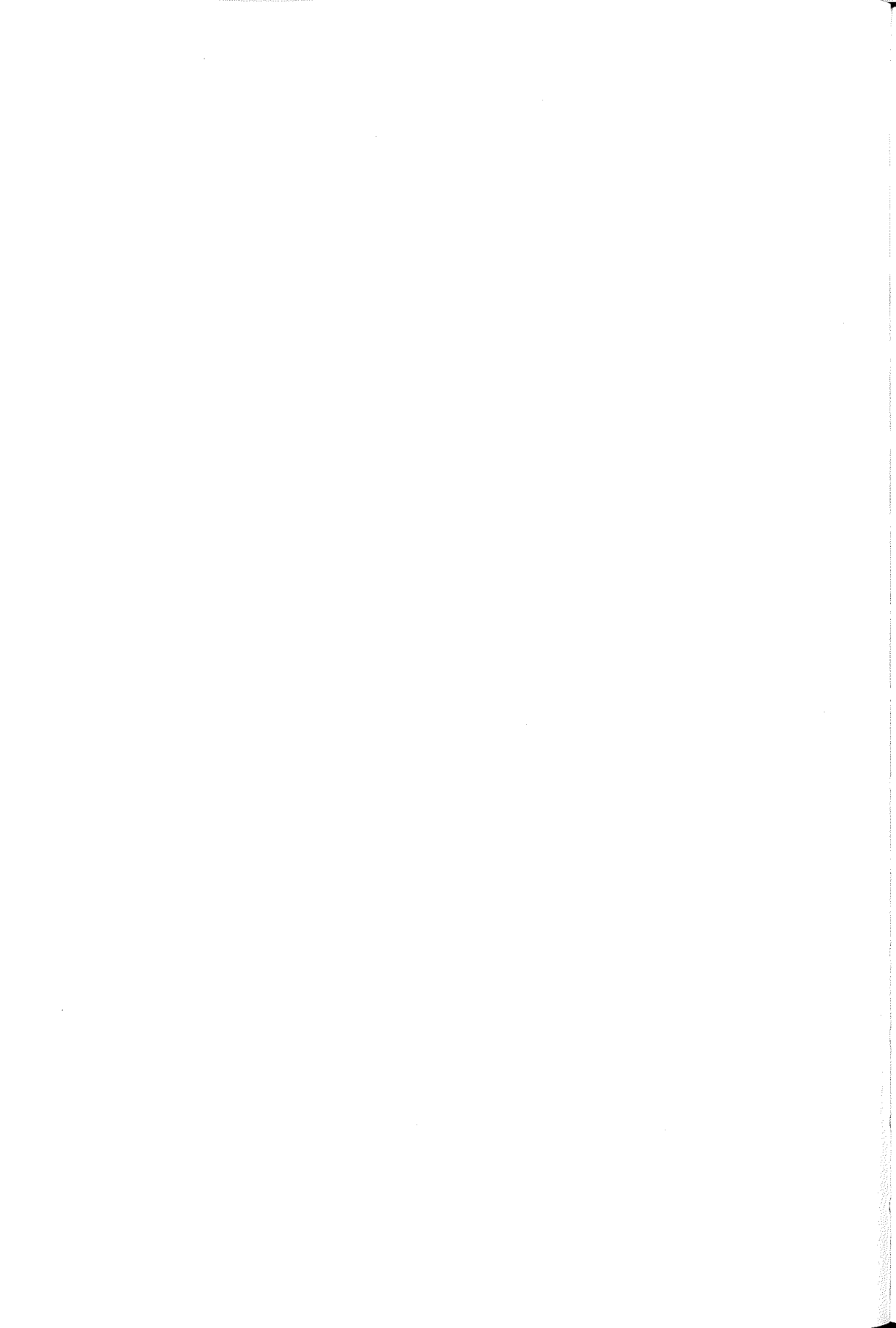
So far they are trying to be nice. They are building a bridge across the Salween River. They are going to destroy the poppies, and in one or two years there will be many different crops. And it will be a tourist place...

I wanted to ask him what he thought about Khun Sa now,⁸⁸ but just then my phone card was used up, and by the time I'd been able to buy another one and call back, the doctor had gone.

BAI

So that was that. There was one bit of good news, about Bai. She was rich now. D. had seen her last year. She had a refrigerator and a television. —Getting better than before, I think, eh? laughed D. I think she must do opium or heroin business.

{See also Annex C: A Brief Chronology of Burma's Insurgencies 1954-1996; and Annex D: Proposal for the Termination of Opium Production in the Shan State.}

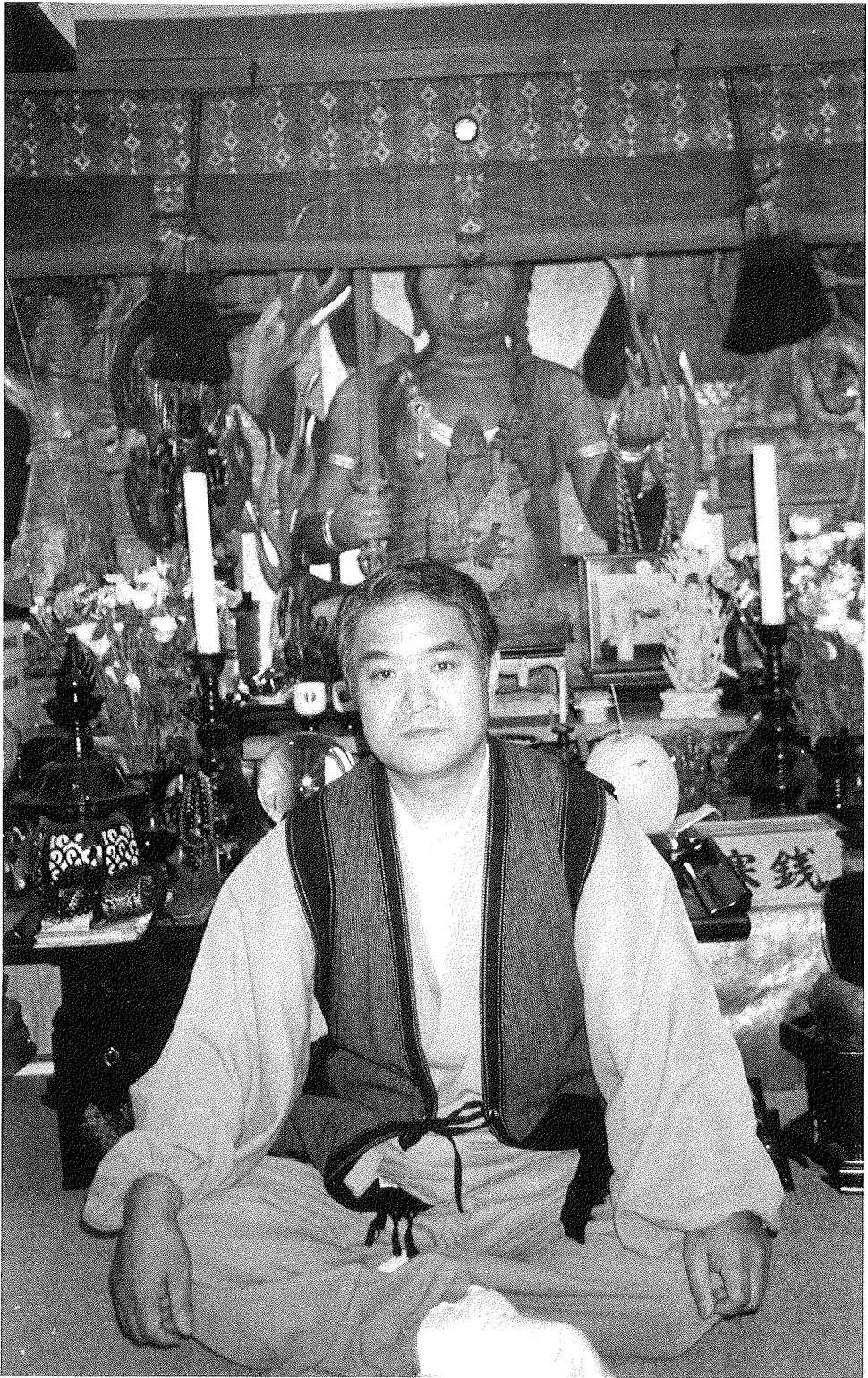


YAKUZA

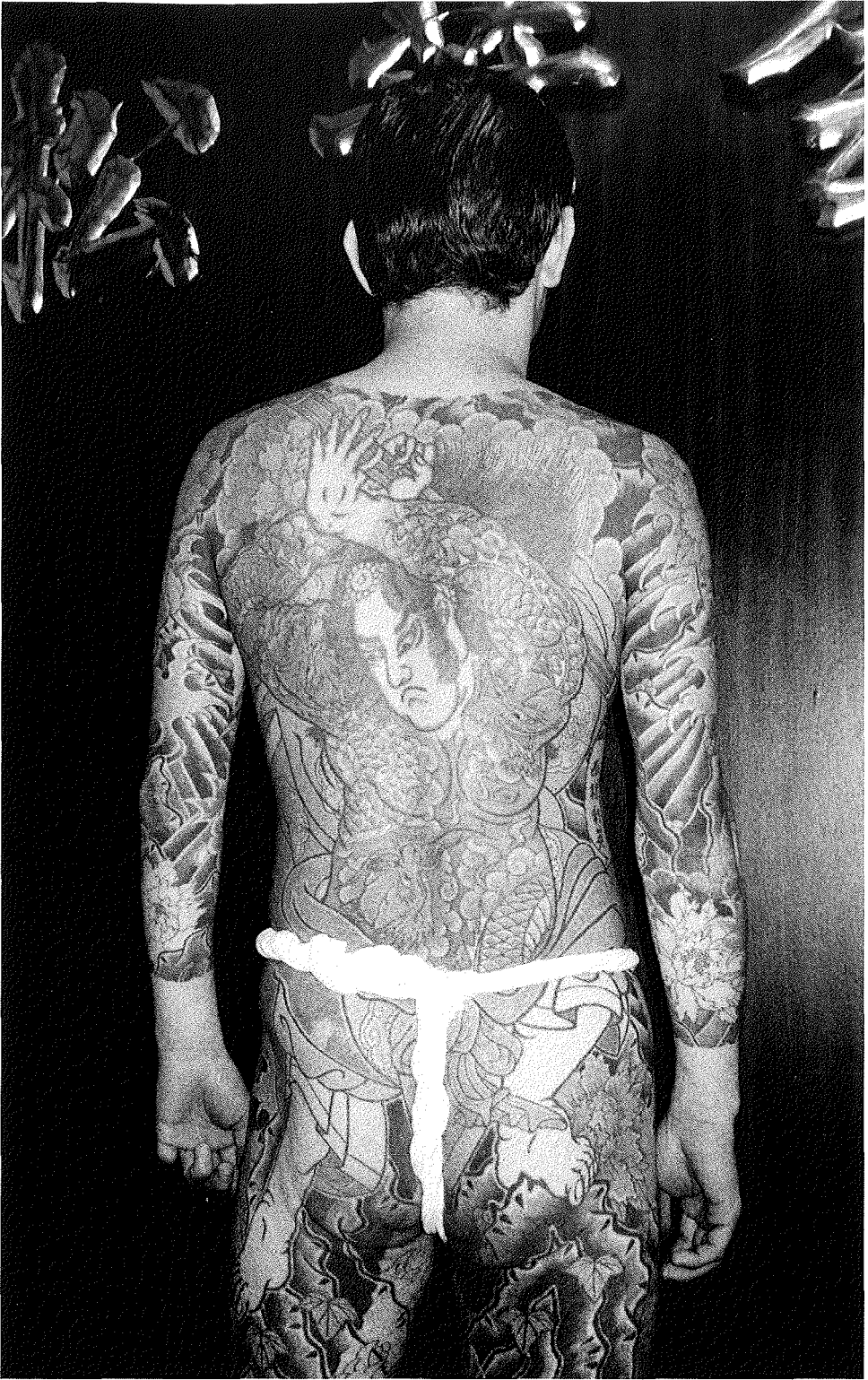
TOKYO, 1998

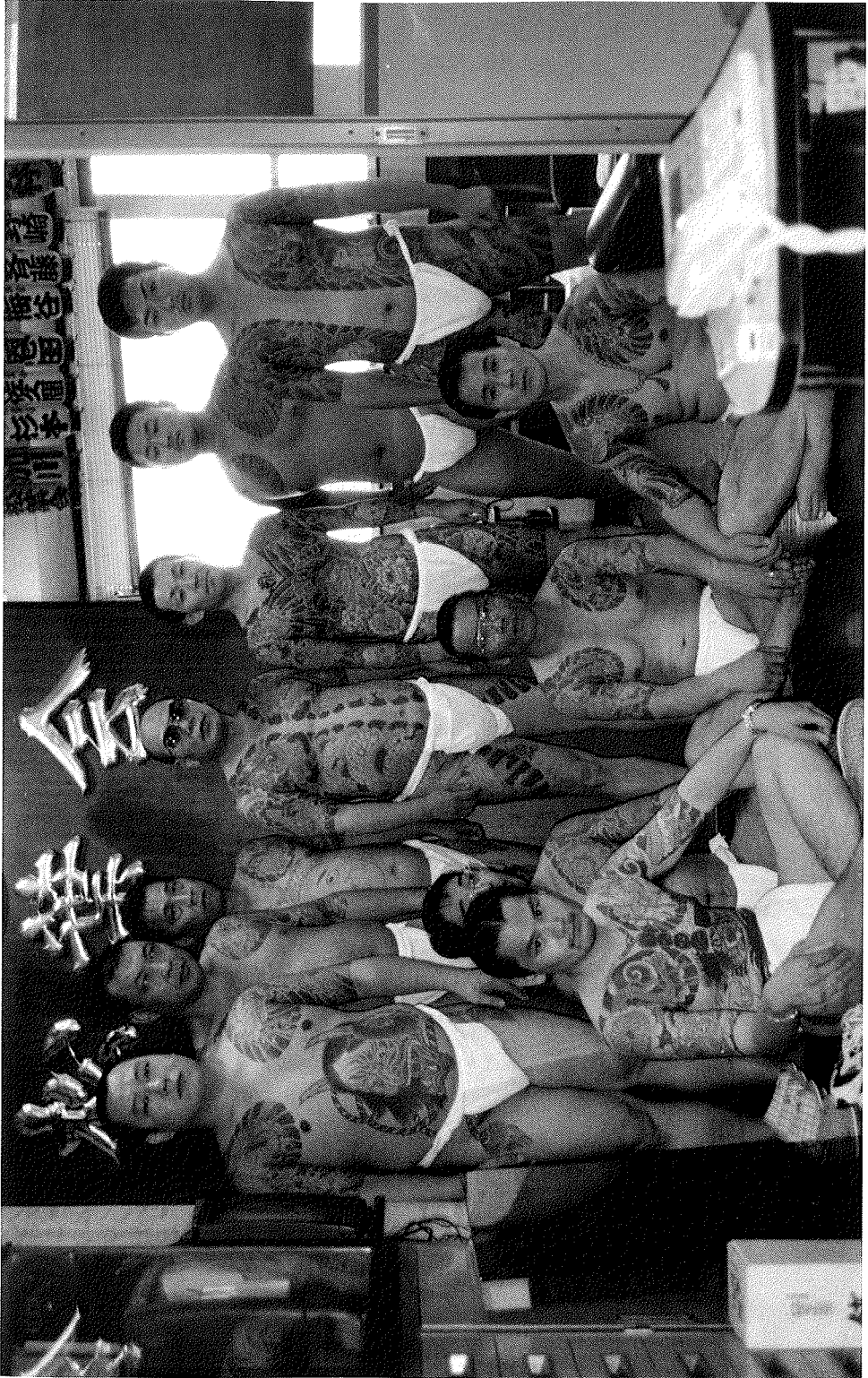
*The tattoos of a Yakuza reify defense of honor, creed,
and loyalty unto death.*

- 294. Mr. Takahiko Inoue, “parent” of about two hundred Yakuza (Inaagawa Association). His memoir seemed to be very popular in the bookstores.
- 295. Two of Mr. Inoue’s “children.”
- 296-97. Members of the Machiya “family.” The gang’s “parent” (back row, in dark glasses) on p. 297 has since been assassinated.











YAKUZA LIVES

(1998)

CHILDREN OF A MODEST MAN [MACHIYA FAMILY]

On the sofa in the inner room there sat a modest man, watchful and slight, in his late middle age. He was concerned that I might confuse his organization with the American Mafia. I said that everyone had been teaching me that his organization was much better than that, because its purpose was to assist the weak. I asked him to please tell me a story or two about the weak whom he had assisted, so that the Americans would understand. He hesitated.

The go-between said: Of course in this world force counts the most, so he is very strong.

Please tell him that I can see he is a very modest man, I said. Please tell him that he is so kind.

Then the modest man got over his modesty a little and said: Well, for example, there was a restaurant owner whose establishment served Korean barbeque meat. He got in some financial difficulty. He owed some dozen million yen¹ that he could not pay. He had to escape somewhere. And so he and his wife came to greet me in person. Although I was one of his creditors, although it was like giving money to a

YAKUZA FAMILIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

YAMIGUCHI-GUMI: 30,000 MEMBERS

SUMIYOSHI-KAI: 10,000 MEMBERS

INAGAWA-KAI: 8,000 MEMBERS

These three, the most powerful and best known Yakuza groups, are associations made up of many families. Traditionally, their income came from gambling, but now they engage in a wider spectrum of legal and illegal activities.

There are fifteen or twenty smaller Yakuza groups, depending on who is counting. In the past, each was associated either with gambling or with *tekiya*, street stall businesses which may be legally run or may sell drugs on the side, extort illegal commissions, etc. They have not yet diversified their operations to as great an extent as the big three. Only those mentioned in this article are listed below.

KYOKUTO-GUMI	tekiya	5-10,000 members
MATSUBA-KAI	more gambling than tekiya	3-4,000 members, <i>of whom about 70 comprise the Machiya Family</i>
MACHIYA FAMILY		
TOA (TOSEI-KAI)	tekiya, pornography, extortion	400-500 members, many of them Korean
ANEGASAKI	gambling, esp. horse races	300-400 members

The Yakuza like to draw a distinction between themselves with their feudal chivalry, and the so-called antisocials or mercenary criminals called *Boryoku-dan*. Ordinary Japanese sometimes reject this distinction.

"But the lower-class Yakuza would do anything just to live."

THE STREET AGENT

thief, I gave him 500,000 yen. Both parties were so moved that we cried.

In the outer room of the modest man's office, which was on an upper floor of a commercial building in an old part of town near the Ginza district, big men were playing mah jong, and the noise of clacking dominoes was like exploding popcorn. The television chattered. We could have been in a union headquarters, or a ward office. In a sense, we were.

The modest man continued: And that restaurant owner disappeared. A few years later I received some gifts of local fruit from a very distant prefecture. At first the presents arrived with no address. Later they began to come with an address, so I knew they were from this man. I was very touched.

Has he ever paid you back?

The modest man laughed and spread his hands. —No, no, he said.

He was the “parent” of the Machiya family, which acknowledged about seventy members. The filial relation is crucial to understanding the Yakuza mentality. —If *parent* and *child* sound strange to American ears, said my translator you could use the words *boss* and *employee*. —Well, I asked, are *parent* and *child* the words an ordinary corporation would use? —No, not exactly, she said. *Lord* and *vassal* might be closer. —But in feudal times did Japanese use the words *parent* and *child*? —No, they said *lord* and *vassal*. And he is literally saying *parent* and *child*, so maybe you should leave it like that.

Someone came in, bowing low, to bring us iced coffee, and then at a summons which I could not detect, one of the modest man's children entered that inner room, ready to tell his own story about how he helped people. He was immense. His round, naked, rocky face gazed upon me pleasantly, because his parent wished it. His arms and legs were swollen with muscle. He sat there easily in his seat beside the modest man, prepared for anything.

He said: My policy for living in this organization is to throw myself away. The organization is always first. This is my belief. I must always come second. I'm not living under my name but under my organization's name. And sometimes I help others physically by my force; sometimes I sell something to help other people.

It must be difficult sometimes, I said, throwing yourself away.

Yes, difficult! Once when I was drinking with a non-Yakuza friend, there came a big Yakuza boss who wanted something quickly and I was reluctant, so my friend, who was feeling very close to me, went to the big boss and insulted him. Within five minutes there were twenty followers of the big boss in that bar. They had come to stab my friend. So I said: Stab me first. And they stabbed me in the thigh.

He showed me the deep scar, which marred the tattoo which he wore like a suit of secret demonic underclothes.

And when you're stabbed, he went on proudly, if you're Yakuza, you shouldn't get upset. You shouldn't lose your spirit.

What did your friend say?

Of course he was sorry for me. But that is how you must do your duty.

You were very brave, I said.

Well, I anticipated they wouldn't stab me, actually, he said with a grin. But you get respect or not, depending on how you behave in a desperate situation. And that was how I helped my friend.

So what's your number one rule?

Make myself second to the organization.

Here came another "child," slender, sad-eyed and trim, with thinning hair, an inward-looking man, almost scholarly in appearance, just back from a fifteen-year stint in prison.

There was a conflict with another organization, which had done unforgivable things, he said. When I overheard that their parent was in the hospital, I went there wearing a white coat to shoot him to death.

Having said this much, the sad-eyed "child" sat very patiently with his fingers interlaced, gazing into space with melancholy attention until the modest man nodded for him to continue.

The other organization had stationed lots of guards, so I hid in the toilet until dark, when there were only three of them. I shot the first guard and killed him. I shot the second in the lower back and paralyzed him for life. The target man was in bed. I failed to kill him, but he killed himself, probably from stress.

Did you have any anger against him?

I saw from the organization's point of view. From that point of view, from the parent, I couldn't forgive him. It's typically said in this world: I don't have any personal feeling, but I have to kill you for the organization. That's why the parent cares for you, because you'll do this.

And then you were arrested?

No. My parent spoke to the police. Next day I went to the station, accompanied by my parent.

This odd detail gives some sense of the degree to which the Yakuza remains embedded in Japanese society. In the old times, Yakuza families dealt mainly in gambling, and one member of each was a bona fide police employee who reported on underworld crimes and trends. A few years ago the law hardened against the Yakuza. But even now, vestigial cooperation between them and the police remains. When the modest man's child shot down the two guards, the police trusted the Yakuza parent to turn in his child at the stipulated time, while the modest man in turn trusted the police to respect his honor.²

I asked the killer: When you turned yourself in, how were you feeling?

Of course I knew what I was going to do. It was just a matter of when. I didn't feel anything particular.

He was really *brave*, said his parent proudly. He anticipated fifteen to twenty years, and I was so emotional I couldn't eat my *tonkatsu*. But he was so calm he ate mine.

No wonder the boss was so modest about his own accomplishments. He had "children" who'd do anything for him.

THE STREET AGENT [FORMERLY ANEGASAKI FAMILY]

Let's define the Yakuza with their courage, their formalized greetings and their respect for elders as *the intersection of feudal chivalry with ruthless self-interest*. That killer who "didn't feel anything in particular," that sworn brother of his who'd offered his thigh to the stabber's knife, they were both samurai, willing to devote themselves heart and soul to the organization. How chivalrous really were Yakuza in our cold world? I decided to ask an underling, a low, lost man. I went looking for one of the weak people they kept talking about.

On the east side of Tokyo's Shinjuku district there is a place called Kabukicho³ where at night the glowing links of neon chains shimmer on white wall-tiles, and marquee of all electric hues amplify themselves like the piano music and the rock music blaring out of hostess bars, strip bars, members-only clubs. Although it is possible to find men's likenesses beckoning to women or to the male-desiring members of their own sex, for the most part what one sees, in such numbing profusion as to seemingly outnumber the wall-tiles, are thousands of rows of girls' photographs—*everywhere*: in the mouths of descending staircases, above and around the trembling curtains of video stores, and even on fluttering little advertisements tapped to pay phones in such profusion as to resemble nesting bats. While certain of the women appear in the flesh to advertise themselves, so that they shine in rows of pink or blue skirts upon the dark pavement, the powers that be (who they are we'll get to presently) find it appropriate to employ minions of men in neckties and pale shirts and dark trousers who nudge interested wallets into commerce with the club they stand for, thereby defeating the myriad competitors. In their efforts to outdo each other, the street agents of Kabukicho (whom it would be a misnomer to call barkers, because unlike their American counterparts they are almost silent) employ the hard sell, hurrying alongside the passers-by, sometimes literally thrusting the "information" in their faces. Long after dark, one sees them wearily half supporting, half leaning on the poles of their immense sex club placards while the girls in the shiny skirts go by and the signs for bars and S & M establishments glow as self-importantly as other illusions. One dumpy old man holds aloft an immense emblem of a cartoon bimbo with bunny-rabbit ears. Glimpsing a party of well-heeled slummers whose white shirts seem as bright as the lamps on bicycles, he chases them valiantly for a block, his standard flying as if he were in battle. And, of course, he is.

His colleague across the intersection, who worked for an S & M club for Japanese only, whispered that if I paid him 10,000 yen instead of the standard five I could go

in and meet the girls even though I wouldn't be allowed to play. His boss, fearing foreigners, rescinded that proposal, at which the street agent consoled me that it was only soft S & M anyway, unlike the Blue Château at whose twentieth anniversary party a lady met each guest at the door and offered from her bowl of party favors two enema bags apiece. I wanted to know the most extreme thing that the girls at his own establishment did. The street agent laughed and said: Overcharging the customers!

He was forty now, and had worked in Kabukicho ever since he'd been either sixteen or nineteen years old, depending on which arithmetic he used. Longing to be somebody important, he tried to tell me the tale of his squandered life, but something was wrong with his mind and he kept having to write dates on the back of one of his S & M fliers, trying to make all the years add up. In its blank universality, his autobiography almost horrified me. He could have been the black American street gangster who killed a bystander for fun just because he'd seen that done in movies. He could have been the white, American movie-actor president who was sure that international politics was a Western with easy good guys and bad guys. He had no ideas of his own.

Growing up on the distant isle of Kyushu, this fellow, son of a penicillin salesman, decided to come to Shinjuku because he was enthralled by a certain television series about a freewheeling private detective. He himself had very noble blood in his veins. It was his misfortune, he said, to have been born an aristocrat and brought up a burglar. He grinned when he told me this, drinking and drinking with a self-satisfied smile. Like the Machiya Yakuza men, he fondled his ideals. Theirs were of manliness, loyalty and display; his were of getting ahead. He'd scarcely touched his dinner, and he was already on his third drink. In his white pinstripe shirt, a pen and a pack of cigarettes inside the breast pocket, his long wide necktie twitching like a panther's tail, he kept wiping the sweat off his narrow, agile, alert face. He was so happy now because somebody was listening to him. Over and over he kept saying that his life ought to be made into a movie.

He told me that he'd taken the slow train from Kyushu to save money, and the heavy rainfall of that year had slowed it down even more so that when he finally arrived at Shinjuku Station he was utterly exhausted, having learned life's most important lesson, namely, that cheap seats never recline. Carrying his two bags into the rain, he walked for hours in his sodden blue jeans, T-shirt and secondhand U.S. army jacket obtained from the base in Kyushu, where at age ten he'd seen his first *Playboy* magazine; and finally his self-preservation instinct warned him to find what he called "a more lively place." He entered a pachinko parlor just before closing time. In those days, he said, desperate people often worked in pachinko parlors: beggars, boys just out of reformatories, ex-cons, ex-Yakuza. He was desperate. He got a job right away, grateful for the food and the heated dormitory.

Over him were set two managers. Each of them lacked a little finger. The Yakuza custom is to cut off this digit to express apology for having made a "mis-

take." Thus recognizing their affiliation, he felt scared—as indeed most Japanese would have been. When I asked the bar hostesses their views on the organization,⁴ they giggled and screamed with terror. They believed (falsely, I think) that anybody who stood in the street outside their clubs was Yakuza. Anybody who was tattooed with cartoons of a dragon or the wind god or the thunder god must be Yakuza. Some of the Kabukicho ladies had Yakuza friends, but even then they expressed nervousness. So the street agent's attitude toward his managers was understandable. Did he consider them his "parents"? I don't think so.

After that first job had wearied him, he'd worked in bars, soaplands (which used to be called Turkish baths until the Turkish embassy complained), sex shops, and other such businesses in Kabukicho. By then he wasn't scared of the Yakuza anymore, he said with that self-satisfied smile, fondling his two cell phones, each of which was as amazingly compact as three fingers pressed together.

How did one recognize a Yakuza? I asked. Well, he replied, signaling for another drink, of course they had a unique way of dressing, a very expensive way. He couldn't put it any more exactly. It wasn't that he was faking or equivocating; he really wanted to make helpful distinctions, but he just couldn't. He was broken inside. What he did know infallibly was how much everything cost and who had to pay what to whom. He started talking about an American Mafia movie he'd seen once. That movie had really impressed him. It was the story of his life. It *was* his life. It was the perfect movie, but he couldn't remember who'd acted in it.

He tucked his hand in his armpit, working on his fourth drink. As he told his endless, monotonous tales of moneymaking, he kept ordering more courses and wasting them. At least he thought to offer them to me like a good host. It was yakitori; my bill was only forty or fifty dollars.

When he was twenty-three and twenty-four he sold pornographic books, which business was at that time almost 100 percent Yakuza controlled. (Now massage parlors were more profitable.) I imagine him as a frenetically unreliable clerk, searching for angles, scheming to go solo as soon as he'd learned the ropes. Having been rendered newly desperate by means of intestinal problems which cost him all his savings, he somehow went to Guam, where he obtained three erotic Swedish videos. Such items were not yet ubiquitous in Japan. And legal prohibitions made them all the more desirable.⁵ A sixty-minute story sold for 80,000 yen (\$625). So, like a drug pusher slicing rocks of crack into adulterated sub-rocks, he transformed his three videos into eight "stories" which he sold in pairs at 20,000 yen a pair—very cheap at the going rate, he said proudly. (He was really quite the philanthropist.) He said that his most lucrative story was of the "Lolita" type, by which I assume he meant child pornography. He made 2,000,000 yen in one month. Everything was perfect, except that he, with his customary low cunning, had been selling the videos *under the counter*, which is to say without the knowledge of his then "parent," his Yakuza boss, a member of the Toa family, who owned that book-

store on a street in Kabukicho where on the night I first met our street agent I saw two drunken businessmen getting each other in chokeholds, and mottled-faced little women in high heels as massive as a boxer's shoulders screamed *aaaaaab!* The street agent, in short, was disobeying the family rule of putting himself second. His parent wasn't getting any commission. If they found out, he might get stabbed. And so finally he quit the bookstore, because they were getting suspicious. In the end his boss did find out, but forgave him, as did I when I found myself paying his outstanding bar bills. He was capable of bursts of energetic sincerity; he could be ingratiating. I think that was what had saved him. The boss even went so far as to cover up his theft from the higher-ups in the organization; our street agent was a lucky grasshopper.

By the time he was twenty-six he'd possessed 20,000,000 yen. (I advise you to reduce this sum by at least one order of magnitude.) That had been his moment of glory, which still illuminated him as brightly yet insubstantially as reflections of neon in the darkened windows of cars behind which the Kabukicho girls, many of them wearing high heels as immense as their purses were tiny, beckoned to strolling businessmen, spreading their legs ever so slightly as they stroked back their hair. Now the street agent was spent, or, as I should say, temporarily between high-paying jobs. That was why he passed out S & M fliers on the street for 1,000 yen an hour. Two weeks after I first met him, he'd quit that job, too.⁶

On his sixth drink he apologized for being so scattered. He couldn't help it, because he was blood type B.

When he reached his early thirties, he'd cut himself loose from his Yakuza connections. It had been so traumatic he still couldn't really talk about it. *Not being able to trust*, he said, that's the number one reason for a Yakuza to retire.

He began his seventh drink and said: There was money involved. And of course whenever there's money involved, many people gather, and they start betraying each other.

He said: Not being able to trust people means not being able to trust life.

Like a bartender in Kabukicho very slowly, carefully sectioning hordes of lemons at opening time, he kept writing out dates, trying to remember whether he'd been thirty-two or thirty-four when this or that event had happened. He kept asking me who'd acted in which American crime movie.

Drunkenly grimacing, clutching his tie, he said: I'm not a Yakuza, but if I had a chance to make something of myself, I'd grab it.

Outside, people laughed into cell phones, while cigarettes hung out of mouths as dark as shoes. I had despaired of getting any generalizations out of him, when he smiled at me so gently and said: The Yakuza way is a very primitive way of life. It's sort of like a baseline of human beings. A normal person would be living for love. But these people, they don't really have those types of things.

I wondered whether he were thinking of himself. He seemed so alone.

THE BROTHER [MACHIYA FAMILY]

The street agent had a brother with whom he stayed, in a district half an hour away by train from Kabukicho, just down the street and under the tunnel from a special bar where for 4,000 yen a JAPANESE ONLY could sit down and get a blow job; but he never spoke much about fraternal loyalty toward this merely biological brother, whereas one bald, high-ranking Machiya man whose sunglasses resembled twin bruises and whose pale skin was as fine suede leather, loved his Yakuza brother enough to sacrifice another human life for him.

The Machiya man said: I killed someone and was in prison, but not for myself. I had a Yakuza brother in another family, which is fairly common. We pledged cups in a sake ceremony. This brother visited my home when I was not there. He was badly bruised, badly punched. When I returned, I tried to contact him, but I couldn't. So I took my "tools" and some colleagues on a visit to his office and tried to discuss the matter. They started yelling at me right away, and the atmosphere deteriorated, so I just stabbed the one who'd bruised my brother. I stabbed him without meaning to kill him, but he died. He was my brother's senior, and was known to be a bully. But because my brother was his younger brother he had tried to be patient.

After that, I asked, were there problems between Machiya and the other family?

No. It was the other organization's institutional problem. It was a family problem. My brother's senior was in the wrong. So the other family was sorry for me, because I had to go to prison.

How many years?

Seven.

Was it very difficult?

I didn't feel it to be so hard. I'm prepared to go to jail at least once in this world. If it were for rape, people would look down on me, but because it was to help someone else, I was respected. I was able to just sit back.

Your brother must be very proud of you.

Yes, I hope so! the man said with a grin. Also, he must sometimes feel that he owes me something.

So he took care of your family while you were in prison?

Of course. And he compensated me. But that's not the point. If you physically help someone, you get a present. If you financially help, you get poor! So the Yakuza has its own strange ways... The whole purpose of the Yakuza is do what you can do for others, to find out how much you can care for others.

THE BOSS [INAGAWA ASSOCIATION]

Mr. Takahiko Inoue, who, said the private detective who led me to him, controlled about 200 henchmen, was wise and seemingly gentle in his condominium from whose dining nook, where we sat together on a long dark horseshoe-shaped couch as if we were in some booth in a diner, there leered wooden statutes of laughing gods. Although he had more fighters at his command than did that modest man, the Machiya “parent,” Mr. Inoue was himself a “child” in the immense Inagawa Association, whose membership rolls boasted 8,000 souls. Three of his “young men” peered at me from the back room, silently snickering as the huge television screen flashed. Later, when I asked Mr. Inoue whether he possessed any tattoos I could photograph, the young men came running like good “children” to help strip off his grey robe and the white shirt beneath it; then Mr. Inoue turned around and showed me the shocking pictures on his back; and at his curt order to strip, two of the young men disrobed for me, the first of them completely because from his neck all the way down to his ankles he was wrapped in a jungle of ominous designs, while the second got to keep his pants on because he was grim-adorned only on his chest. (I thought of the Kabukicho prostitute who’d told me that she’d refrained from getting tattooed only because everyone would have feared and shunned her in the public baths.) Mr. Inoue, himself a high school dropout, said smilingly that one was a university graduate, from the Department of Jurisprudence, no less. —He could have been a lawyer, or a court judge! exclaimed the private detective. But now with his tattoo I don’t think he’ll go that way...

Broad and very smoothfaced, Mr. Inoue said that his career had begun when he was in his teens back in Kyushu. He had begun to lead a small group of other young men according to very strict rules: Don’t smoke, don’t drink, don’t go out with women, and don’t intimidate others.

And how did you get the idea to lead such a group? I asked.

Many young men went to Tokyo, then returned without employment and behaved like intimidators, selling party tickets and blackmailing. I refused to associate with them. Others came to me for help, and so it became a group.

Why did they come to you for help?

Because I was a man of strong arm. Weak young men, if they came to me, the intimidators would not come to them any longer.

With a proud smile he added: I quarreled physically more than 200 times. This is on the record. And I always won. But I never took the initiative in any quarrel.

In the rear there was a Shinto shrine whose immense seated god bore a sword. On the altar were two white candles each of which he said had spontaneously dripped into a dragon shape on the day that his shrine was first consecrated. He wanted me to photograph these and I did. He also gave me several Polaroids of the

candles. I presented one each to the private detective and to the go-between. Looking at my Polaroids now as I write, I have to say that it is peculiar the way the wax spills all to one side, curving away from the candle like the handle of a pitcher, then almost rejoining it, and, at that point, gaping in a sort of mouth which points downward.

When did you first realize that you had exceptional physical strength? I asked.

My family derives from samurai swordsman. Our protective temple dates back to the thirteenth century. When I was ten years old, my father was famous in the town. He ran in the city council election. Everybody knew him. But when he failed in the elections, everybody's attitude changed. My way of life changed.

Were they Heike or Genji? I asked, referring to the two rival clans of medieval Japan.

Genji. But my ancestors got separated, and they fought each other. Brother fought against brother. Even if one perished, another would survive.

Did you have a hero from the past?

Hideyoshi, he said, referring to the famous seventeenth century lord of Osaka. I myself had just been to the Kabuki-za theater two days previously, where one of the plays in that five-hour program dealt with Hideyoshi's son, who was temporarily saved from defeat and execution through the sagacity of a loyal vassal named Kiyomasa. Having begun to suspect that for the Yakuza such behavior would be emblematic, I uttered Kiyomasa's name and was rewarded with delighted smiles by the Yakuza leader and his three "children."

And when did you first hear the word Yakuza? I asked.

Every Japanese since being very small knows the word. But it depends where he lives. Some worship that word, and some fear it. If you meet a good Yakuza you will worship him.

So in Kyushu it must be a good word, I said.

When I was very small, they all felt a kind of familiarity if not identity. Now the Yakuza is feared in Kyushu, but before, no. And, you know, the way of the Yakuza is inherited from the samurai.

All right, I said. So this group which you founded in Kyushu, was it a Yakuza group?

At that time, six hundred members belonged. It was called the Dragon Concession Society. But it was not Yakuza.

And then?

I came to Yokohama, where my elder brother was boss of a leading group of stevedores. There were several stevedore groups that were controlled by the Yakuza. And I had to fight with an executive of the Inagawa branch, he said.

So you argued with him?

I quarreled with him physically.

About what?

A trifling thing. Just some intervention in business, he said with twinkling eyes. And so what happened?

We fought physically, and the other guy's neck was broken.

Ah, I said.

We had a mutual arrangement before the fighting that if either side was killed, a double would be offered to the police in place of the killer. So that double went to jail, a young man. As it happened, the executive survived, even with a broken neck. But the Yakuza made a suggestion that as long as I didn't join an organization, I would not survive. So I was inducted into the Yakuza.

And because he was Inagawa you joined the Inagawakai?

That's right. But it wasn't quite that simple, he continued. You see, although I had won the battle against the Yakuza executive, the war between us was still going on. Remorse had to be shown by our side. So when the fight was over, my elder brother and I went to visit my opponent's boss, but first my elder brother cut off his little finger as a token of apology. And so he was pardoned. He and I joined the Yakuza together. At the ceremony, sake was offered three times in little cups.

Why did your brother cut off his finger and not you?

We had an argument about that. I insisted that I should be the one to do it. But he insisted that being the elder, the superior, he must take the responsibility.

Was he proud of you for winning the fight, or was he angry at you for putting you in the position of losing your finger?

Of course my elder brother was very happy, he said, and I saw that Mr. Inoue remained proud of what he had done.

When was that?

In 1962, he said. And I've been Yakuza all the way ever since. I was the youngest Yakuza group leader at that time. I was eighteen or nineteen.

And in those thirty-seven years, what's been the most difficult situation you've had to face?

Going to jail.

How did that happen?

In this world since the old days, gambling is a way of life for the Yakuza to make a living. Gambling tools are supposed to be handled only by the Yakuza, not by laymen. And one gambling shop opened which was owned by a layman. So a young man and I went there and asked for our commission.

(To the private detective, by the way, this was quite natural. In our post mortem of the interview, with our feet up in my hotel room gazing down at the skyscrapers, he said: Of course the Yakuza have been here a long time, and it is true that this is the tradition. Therefore, it is only right that they have a say.)

So when you asked for your commission, how did the owner respond?

He went to the police. I was charged with blackmailing. I was in jail for two years. I haven't been to jail in the twenty-one years since.

And what happened to the gambling shop?

Because police intervened, nothing happened. After half a year, the owner of the gambling house was stabbed to death. It was rumored that this must be my responsibility, but the police couldn't get evidence. In the end, a man in the street who'd had some quarrel with the owner surrendered himself. And the shop was closed.

You must have been happy, I said.

No, said Mr. Inoue sharply, I was very unhappy.

In prison, were you treated with respect?

Yes, I won some respect. But in prison there are all sorts of people. *Rapists!* he cried in disgust.

And the organization took care of your family?

I was already boss. My young men continued to work for me.

They didn't try to take over?

All the Yakuza in the room roared with laughter at this absurd and possibly insulting question. Unwittingly, I had demeaned Mr. Inoue's "children." Would good children rebel against their father?

Of course not, said Mr. Inoue. The word is *loyalty*. In Japan, this is a special community, with a strong hierarchical relation created by an exchange of sake cups. If somebody calls black white, you must follow it, if it comes from above.

So what ethical principles must a Yakuza follow?

Faith, that is the word. In the relation between boss and henchman, faithfulness must be the rule. We must be faithful to our parents, said Mr. Inoue, and he gave me a video which showed fifteen "children," most of them quite old, ceremonially pledging themselves to, and being accepted by, their big boss. This was the way to survive: to throw oneself heart and soul into the organization so that one could get noticed and become a useful "child" of a powerful "parent." Then by the time one got old and physically feeble, hopefully one possessed an army of one's own devoted "children."

In the video, one Yakuza functionary in his speech called himself the match-maker, go-between for "parent" and "children", and the banquet hall was laid out as if for a wedding, with proper names calligraphied on strips of paper on the wall, and mountains of fruit on the Shinto altar, for good luck a lobster and a red snapper (whose name is a play on the word for happiness), along a strip of white paper on the red carpet. An acolyte poured shrine-wine into the flattish white sake cups. The Yakuza bowed to the sun-goddess Amaterasu, progenitress of the Japanese; the Emperor is supposed to be directly descended from her. In the ceremony, the old men said that these fifteen latest "children" represented the eighth generation of the Inagawa Yakuza. One of the "children" said in his acceptance speech: We are determined to be the arms and feet of the parent, so we can support him.

And now Mr. Inoue began to tell me about the "Yakuza spirit," for which the private detective, who was translating and who was very impressed by him,

employed the allegory of Robin Hood. —Robin Hood beat the strong, he said. He robbed them for the sake of the weak. And Mr. Inoue is saying that this corresponds to the business world, where there are so many bankruptcies and bad checks. So, the weak come for help to Mr. Inoue. They try to beat the strong, who in this case is the man with money. They are suffering from bad transactions due to some rich guy. If they go to lawyers, it will take a long time.

There was some truth to that. Moreover, everyone in the know concurred in telling me that the Yakuza made frequent and generous donations to charity, that they had helped the victims of the infamous Kanto and Hanshin⁷ earthquakes, that they underwrote community festivals, that in the old days they used to offer their services as unpaid neighborhood arbitrators. They were expedient, practical men in the service of their ideals, like that Machiya “parent” we met before, the modest man, who upon seeing a bankrupt man preparing to jump off a bridge grabbed him, slapped him in the face for forgetting his parents, wife and children, put him under guard until he regained his senses, then fixed everything with his loan shark, either by paying off the debt from his own pocket or else by leaning on the loan shark a little, I don’t know which. The grateful debtor prospered sufficiently to give his parents a splendid funeral. When he expressed thanks, the modest man replied, like a sternly benevolent father, that instead of wasting time with his gratitude, he’d better be preparing for his two daughters’ marriages. This story pleased me and everyone who heard it.

Perhaps Mr. Inoue could tell me a story about one of the weak people he helped, I said.

Mr. Inoue seemed irritated by this question, perhaps because there were so very many examples at his disposal that to single out any one case as if it were unique was to neglect all the others. But finally he told the heartwarming tale of a client of his who had presided over a company that went belly up. He owed millions of yen. His creditor was also Yakuza, so that made things go very smoothly. “Instead of obfuscating,” the private detective translated, the two sides met and exchanged documents. It turned out that the president of the bankrupt company was actually owed money by the supposed creditor firm.

He must have been very grateful to you, I said. Mr. Inoue laughed happily. —Yes, and now my client operates a very big company!

My time was up then, but I begged to ask one final question: When is violence justified?

What I meant, of course, was how violence could be justified *in the heart*. Such had been my implication every time I asked people this very important question, as I had been doing now for many years. But Mr. Inoue, interestingly enough, interpreted the matter as one of public justification (as had my translator), I later discovered. And so he said quite simply: *Might is justified*.

Very elegant, I said.

Consider international law, he said. At one time America was fighting in the Vietnam War. The United States couldn't show much might in Vietnam, so couldn't justify the war. But in the Pacific War against Japan, the United States showed sufficient might by using atomic bombs and force, and therefore the United States could justify the war.

THE HOSTESS [UNAFFILIATED]

The name of the pretty young girl was Kazuki,⁸ and her occupation was to entice men off the street and downstairs to the dim dark bar, long and narrow, where there waited a long line of ladies dressed in bathing suits. She was good at pouring drinks; she knew just how to lay down chopsticks in case the interpreter and I felt like bankrupting my editors on snacks. She said that people got murdered in Kabukicho pretty frequently—not as frequently as in my country, of course—anyway, she never knew why, perhaps on account of the Yakuza, and that one afternoon only two or three days after she had first started working there she saw a man lying stabbed and bleeding, not yet dead, and nobody dared to help him, so Kazuki did not help him, either, even though she wanted to.

Well, said the private detective when I told him this story, of course it's a shame when this thing happens. But perhaps Mr. Inoue is not responsible for such occurrences. From the principles he has stated, he is a good man. But maybe some other Yakuza are not the same.

THE PARENT [SUMIYOSHI ASSOCIATION]

Mr. Ryuma Suzuki, the second-in-command of the Sumiyoshi Association, had at his disposal 10,000 followers. Nominally he was now number three, having recommended a month or two before that one of his "children" be promoted over him, but given the Confucianist loyalty of every good Yakuza "child" I would imagine that he continued to possess as much authority he ever—and not just over the Sumiyoshi. —He's a great man, said his carp-tattooed cadre of the fifth rank. He's a wise man. He has a lot of acquaintances, including Indians. His network is so great. —The modest man of the Machiya family, who played mah jong with Suzuki-san on a regular basis, spoke reverentially of his eloquence and brilliance.

Mr. Suzuki had never met Mr. Inouye, but when I displayed the latter's business card, Mr. Suzuki nodded wearily, referring to him as "the boy" or "the young man." Later I learned that I had committed a faux pas suggesting even an indirect comparison between him and someone so far below him.⁹ Mr. Inouye was a child, and Mr. Suzuki a parent—no matter that they belonged to different Yakuza families.

Mr. Suzuki's head was very round and dark, with white hairs on the cheeks, like a coconut. He sat at a little round table by the picture window in the lounge at the Capitol Tokyo Hotel, which my Tokyo guide explains to me is "a favourite among business people...rated highly for its views and friendly service."¹⁰ Unlike Mr. Inoue, he continued untattooed. When he was young, his boss had forbidden him to get pricked, on the grounds that fashions changed. Casually dressed, gruff and curt in many of his answers to my questions, he nonetheless lingered afterward, discoursing on the eleven causes of cancer, sketching a diagram of how chance could shear off electrons within the body and create the dreaded free radicals. Gleeefully he showed me a newspaper photograph of himself standing beside his suit of neo-samurai armor; the point was that his portrait was much larger than the one of President Clinton on the same page. I think that this self-made man wanted to impress others.¹¹

Mr. Suzuki, what does the word *Yakuza* mean to you? I inquired, ready with my pen and notebook to be his obedient schoolboy.

It means *courtesy, chivalry, benevolence, charity, perfect virtue to help others*. If you see someone drowning and even though you don't know how to swim you jump in, then you have courage. Then you're a real *Yakuza*! he cried in his low, guttural voice.

When did you first decide to join the organization?

I was seventeen. It was under the American occupation in 1945. The day before, the Americans had been our enemies. Then the Americans were occupying, and we had to respect them. The teachers who used to say that the Americans were bad, bad, bad enemies were now timid in front of them, smiling at them, hoping to get chewing gum. The decisive event was when we went on a hiking event with a teacher I respected. He'd told us that even we failed in the war we shouldn't be servile. But then the Americans came in a jeep to ask directions. The teacher answered in his poor English, and they gave him a cigarette for his flattering smile. After that I didn't trust the teachers, so I started wrongdoing. I watched a lot of gangster movies...

Did you hate the Americans at that time?

Yes. I thought they were demons that might eat me!

And how did you feel when they ordered your Emperor to say on the radio that he was not a god anymore?

I didn't care. I was more interested in food. I went fishing that day.

This answer befitted the man, I thought. He was not a bit interested in Mr. Inoue's Polaroid of the dragon-shaped candle. He said that there was no relation between the *Yakuza* and Shinto, that the Shinto altar in that video of the adoption ceremony was "just a formality." He was an all-business hardliner.

All right. So then what happened?

In senior high school I went with another student to a dance hall, and saw a scene that surprised me: One Japanese was using foreign people as his subordinates instead of smiling at them. He'd say, get me some cigarettes, and the Americans

would go and do it! I really admired him! croaked Mr. Suzuki with a hoarse laugh. And in two years I replaced him.

How did you do that?

He grinned and began punching the air with his fists. And I thought of Mr. Inoue with his 200 victorious “physical quarrels.” (I had asked one of my go-betweens how far one could rise in Yakuza just by being clever and nice. —No hope! he laughed, But if you’re smart, you can sell your brain to serve someone you hope is strong, then stay with him as his number two...)

When I was eighteen years old, Mr. Suzuki went on, I was so famous! Fighting was my business. So I was very quick. The first punch is very important. You have to be smart. If you are one and the opponents are five, then you must go into a very narrow place or a staircase so they can only come one by one. A staircase is the best. When they approach me, I can just kick! he chuckled. And if I have some weapon and they don’t, that’s unfair, so I’ll give him the knife—and then immediately take it away and scratch his face! Ha, ha, ha!

When did you first use a gun?

In 1956, in a fight between Yakuza organizations, he said with a bored, narrow-eyed look.

What was your ambition when you joined?

I wanted to be the number one leader in Japan by the time I was thirty, since trying to be number one by age forty was too easy.

He sat there fidgeting and staring at me through half-closed eyes.

How many members do you have?

Ten thousand, he said. And later on he said: You may think that the parent would be proud of how many subordinates have been injured for him. But I’m proud when my subordinates have committed no crime.

(He’d been a good parent to the Russian boy he’d fostered. He was very proud of the boy, who’d gotten a scholarship to an American university, “first of 5,000,” he said.)

Can others recognize members of your organization? Do Yakuza wear certain types of tattoos?

No, you can’t tell, he said, irritated. We’re not a tribe.

So to what extent is your organization a business, and to what extent is it an association to help the weak?

There’s no difference between these, he said with a grimace.

And what have you accomplished which you’re the most proud of in your Yakuza career?

I’m never proud of myself. I’m still pursuing the goal.

And what’s that?

I’d like to be a person who is *relied* on by people, a person who’s *required* by people. That’s why I’m poor.

What's the difference between the Yakuza and the Mafia?

In Japan we have not just Yakuza but also organized crime, the Boryoku-dan. Their material resources come from drugs, prostitution and burglary. The Mafia is more like the Boryoku-dan. The Mafia began with youngsters standing up to protect the country against the French, but they were poor, so they needed money, so they went to the United States where they made their own rules. But the Yakuza is totally different. What we do is help the weak. And if the weak are so appreciative and bring money, then we refuse to receive it unless they insist. I have been a Yakuza for fifty years and I have no contact with the Boryoku-dan.

Then we refuse to receive it, unless they insist. What did this mean in practice? Let's again follow that would-be film star, that street agent in Kabukicho, who took me to the illegal gambling house whose sign promised that it only cost ten yen to get in—but a mere ten yen wouldn't get anybody *out*, he laughed. I took notes, and instantly a man came out the door to study us. The agent said that there were video cameras everywhere. He said that these places usually weren't run directly by the Yakuza, but they had to pay protection money of around 2 to 300,000 yen a month on the average. If their profits increased, why, so did their commission. —Yakuza wait for you to get fat, *then* kill you! he said. And here I recalled the reason that Mr. Inoue went to jail.

The boss of our street agent's S & M club paid 100,000 every month to the Toa family. But he also had to pay off Group Five of the Sumiyoshi family—13,000 a day, which bought one Sumiyoshi sandwich board man to advertise the club. Paying the street agent to do it would have been cheaper for the boss, but the Sumiyoshi might not have liked that. They controlled a pool of signboard men whose labor they rented out to captive proprietors—those tired men leaning up against their signs, smoking cigarettes or talking wistfully on their little cell phones or just gazing into space. From their 13,000 a day, the Sumiyoshi skimmed off five. The Toa ran a similar payroll.

Is Kabukicho controlled by the Boryoku-dan? I asked Mr. Suzuki.

No, by the Yakuza.

Who is stronger, the Yakuza or the Boryoku-dan?

At this unseemly question Mr. Suzuki expressed both anger and irritation—and here I should say that throughout the interview I felt slightly intimidated by the way the man leaned forward as he talked, sometimes coming quite close with his glowering red face whose little eyes were fixed on me. I cannot really convey his expression when this question, which had unwittingly challenged his assertion of power, first came into the air, but at least he did answer; he replied: Yakuza.

Who has greater numbers?

Yakuza. There are fewer Boryoku-dan. The Yakuza are much stronger. They can't come close to me.

Japanese newspapers routinely referred to his family, the Sumiyoshi family, as

Boryoku-dan. But I thought it best to change the subject, so I asked him to tell me what he did the course of a day.

It's not like the movies, he said. I exercise in the morning, because I want to live. I sweat, and then I can drink tasty water. I eat breakfast; I get lots of phone calls. I use this place as my office. There are lots of Boryoku-dan people here. But because of my presence they make no trouble.

Do the police respect you and treat you well?

Yes they do. I'm doing something that the police *should* do, he said, pounding his chest. Recently at a party I made a speech and the mayor requested to shake my hand. In the newspapers I rank with Clinton and Hashimoto.

(In my hotel lobby the next morning, when I displayed to the bell captain Mr. Suzuki's thick white business card of handmade paper imprinted with a gold crest, the bell captain slammed his hand over his gaping mouth and his eyes practically popped out. *Very famous!* he cried. But Pynchon's translator, Mr. Yoshiaki Sato, assured me that he had never heard of him. To the waiter at the restaurant where I went for breakfast the card meant nothing.)

What do ordinary Japanese think about you?

They're afraid, on account of the media.

(But those who knew the Yakuza seemed to fear them even more. Trying to help me, my friend and translator Reiko had invoked her mother, whose three friends ran "stores" of some sort in Kabukicho—when Reiko used this tactful word, it could mean anything from a minimart to a sex club. All three ladies had refused to make any introductions. They were afraid, they said. And in tones of earnestness that shocked Reiko, who possessed romantic notions that the Yakuza would never hurt "civilians," they entreated her for her own safety not to interview any Yakuza at all in Kabukicho.)

The Yakuza is not a criminal organization, Mr. Suzuki continued.¹² That's why I can relate to the police. We're guardians of the town. If some suspicious person comes, the police can do nothing since he still hasn't done anything. Only the Yakuza can help. If a resident asks us to get rid of some scary guy, we'll do it for no money. If the other guy uses violence, we might use violence. It's only self-defense.

When is violence justified?

In education, if one student comes late every day, then if oral discipline doesn't work, you have no way other than to hit him. If the teacher hits him, the parents should thank the teacher. You can do that even with your wife, he said, leering at Takako. —It's just because I'm human, not because I'm Yakuza. Whenever you have no other way, violence is justified.

In my school days I saw lots of bullying, he went on. Because I have the chivalrous spirit, whenever a bully came to somebody, I would always help the weak. That's why the weak always follow me. But these days in school, all the kids go to the stronger one. That's the difference between the old days and today.

Why the change?

Because *I* was there at the time, growled the Yakuza leader, thumping his chest. These days a hero cannot be created.

He brooded in his chair for awhile, fanning his red face with a paper fan. Then he said to me: What is your life?

I want to be good, I answered. I want to do good.

No, he said. *What is your life?*

I could not answer to his satisfaction. He leaned forward and shouted: *What is your life?* as he stabbed his forefinger into my shirt. He said: *Life is God.* Jesus, Buddha, they all noticed that life is God. And our life is based on the sacrifice of people who are starving. One-third of the human race is hungry. If that one-third eat as they like, the rest will be starving. I know. Because I've experienced that time when all the baseball fields were cultivated for food.

The street agent had told me that some of the richest Yakuza he'd worked for still wouldn't trust anybody below them to count a heap of one-yen coins. —Mostly, he'd told me, they have very sad childhoods, like babies found in coin lockers, or boys sent to the reformatory and like that. And even among them there's discrimination. They look down on you if you come from North Korea, or from a coin locker... —And this, perhaps, was the key to understanding Mr. Suzuki. He'd grown up hungry and desperate. From this he'd drawn certain conclusions, not the least of which was, in his own words: *If you shout for help at midnight, all the neighbors will lock their doors.*

THE STREET AGENT [FORMERLY ANEGASAKI FAMILY]

Having just now recollected him, let's pay one more visit to that street agent of ours, who toiled so wearily for his boss's S & M club, which promised the businessmen all kinds of rubbery delights and then charged them 30,000 yen for a 4,500-yen hand job. If they complained, the employees tried to "persuade" them, he said. This persuasion must have been of a pretty soft character, partaking of only the lowest level of intimidation, for should they threaten to go to the police nonetheless, the club kept their money but still permitted them to walk out. Meanwhile, needless to say, the boss dispatched a man to follow them. If they went home, that was the end of the story; they never got their money back. If they approached the police station, the stalker rushed up to return every last yen on the spot. Here, then, as in the Yakuza world which the club supported, only might and force got rewarded. This was the sort of place for which our street agent was now wearing out his shoes, with a photograph of his sister and her child in his pocket, a well-fingered color photo of suburban happiness on a green lawn somewhere in Los Angeles as he passed out those yellow fliers for the fine salary of 1,000 yen an hour (my translator Takako's

fee was 8,000 and she deserved every last yen). The Yakuza helped the weak, everybody said. Well, he was the weak. What had they done for him?

When he'd worked for a Toa-run soapland, which offered private baths with ladies available for regular, double, and double-extra service, his "parent" made him go to department stores to steal toilet paper for the establishment. This had been a real education, he said dryly. Perhaps it had been that very education which had taught him to remove child pornography videos from their plastic housings and wrap the snakes of naked film around his body for ease of smuggling. Had he similarly unwound the toilet paper from the cardboard tubes? In any event, the story shows how much the family into which he'd been adopted valued his labor and his risk—quite literally, it was worth less to them than toilet paper.

Do you believe that the Yakuza help the weak? I asked.

That's what they say, he murmured. Yes, he was the weak. Fearing and protesting, not even daring to ask me for an extra thousand yen, he'd just allowed me to photograph him with one of those "Lolita" magazines of his.¹³ (A child was trying to swallow a man's penis.) The agent begged me not to photograph his face; if the photo were published, his sister might find out. After all, she had a child—

Those fliers fluttering everywhere were another source of lucre for the Yakuza. Here, for instance, was a money-shaped coupon whose enticements, white on black and black on white, were succinctly represented on the lefthand side by the smiling naked longhaired Japanese girl whose hands were demurely crossed between her thighs and upon whose impressive breasts big nipple-stars had been pasted. On the back of the coupon was a map. It is the nature of advertisements, if they are at all successful, to reveal the advertiser, and from this the Yakuza snatched full advantage. Each telephone booth was the territory of a specific Yakuza family, and so the advertisers had to pay 5,000 yen per day for each set of fliers they posted in that territory, which the family guarded with the same jealous patriotism displayed by nations. Some of the few gangland shootings that occurred in Tokyo each year were over territory, because the family that allowed a rival to seize its telephone booths lost not only money, but face. For the captive advertisers, at least, the gangsters made it convenient: a lump sum payment would do—protection money plus appropriate fees, just like my bank. Refrain from paying, and tattooed ghouls need only pluck a flier from their phone booth and follow the map printed on it straight to their prey.

It was part of the street agent's job to affix his boss's fliers to the appropriate telephone booths. Although his boss by paying enjoyed full license from the Yakuza to have the agent do this, the agent had no such license from the phone company, who disagreed with the Yakuza as to whose territory the phone booths really were. In other words, the agent had been promoted from stealing toilet paper to posting illegal bills. He'd never been arrested for that, he said; he was rapidity itself (and here I saw another feeble attempt to polish his self-importance). But two or three

times every month he had to go to the police station to confirm the identity of one of his colleagues, who evidently was not so quick. He took all the risks, while his boss and the Yakuza took most of the profits. Yes, he was the weak.

He said that members of the Yakuza didn't get any salary from the organization, so they had to earn their living themselves. Moreover, they sometimes felt obliged to pay contributions, which were even higher than those of "laymen" like his boss. So they did what they thought they had to, pimping out their wives to strip clubs, or extorting a little more frantically from their satellites... That was how they helped the weak. The street agent had once belonged to the Anegasaki, to whom he'd had to pay 50,000 yen a month. Finally he couldn't stand it; he decided to stop.

Mr. Suzuki had insisted that Yakuza never kept any would-be quitters against their will, since "quitters just make trouble." This proved, he said, that the Yakuza was no criminal organization, because criminals have to kill their turncoats to prevent blackmailing. (I merely wondered: How does he know what criminals need to do.) Perhaps in the Sumiyoshi this is true; I have no information to the contrary. Every Yakuza group is different. But what had happened to the street agent when he quit the Anegasaki? His "parent" was in jail; he'd never met him. But two "elder brothers" came to administer discipline. It seemed that they followed Mr. Suzuki's moral calculus regarding the justification of violence. One of them was a pro wrestler and the other was a former pro kick boxer. The kick boxer was very proud of his ability to ride long distances on trains without paying. He accomplished this through intimidation or else by making disturbances to distract the conductor. He and the wrestler began punching the agent, right there in the street. Everybody else hurried by, just like pretty young Kazuki in that hostess bar who'd seen the stabbed man and was too afraid to help him, and ashamed of being afraid. As they punched the agent, they regaled him with tales of their skill in violence. The pro wrestler, for instance, said that after a mere three minutes of punching, one of his previous victims was on the point of death. Shall we call this a constructive moral exhortation for the benefit of the weak? The street agent thought himself a goner. He told me that he was so afraid, so afraid. But they hurt him neither seriously nor permanently. They merely bruised him, especially about the face. Then they dragged him into a coffee shop for further discussions. Firstly he had to apologize to his elder brothers, and secondly he had to promise to rejoin the Anegasaki. He did, but only for a short time. His mental stability was poor, and the Anegasaki didn't want crazy people or drug addicts. Becoming one of these was the only way out, unless one paid big money or cut off the tip of a finger.

And yet you stayed here, I said. Why do you love Kabukicho?

He thought, tilted his head and slowly grinned. —Somehow it suits me.

What do you think about the Yakuza?

Takako had to repeat the question several times. He didn't want to answer. Finally he said: I don't think anything. Perhaps it's a necessary evil. Without them,

probably society wouldn't run. There might be some riots or something. This area might become a slum. Bad foreigners might take over—Arabs, Iranians...

REGRETS OF A SCHOOLTEACHER [SUMIYOSHI, 5TH RANK]

On his back, the man who'd wasted his life wore a tattoo (of which he was now ashamed) of a carp swimming up a waterfall. The carp symbolizes good fortune, happiness; and he told me a legend that the carp which attains the top of the fall becomes a dragon. Skinny and wrinkled, he was fifty-six years old, and had been a Yakuza member for four decades. Like Mr. Suzuki, whom he revered, he had joined right after Japan lost World War II. He too had never completed high school. — My family was poor, he said. Everybody was poor. It was easier to live this way, and it matched my character.

You were in many fights?

Of course.

And you won many?

Some, he said modestly. In the Yakuza, if you're too strong, you are no good. You tend to get killed.

So what was your first job in the organization?

I was a bookie for the horse races. The orders to do that didn't really come from the top. We all did it to live. And then I did some things which were real estate-related, some things I prefer not to talk about.

In the bubble economy period, the street agent put in (for this interview he was my go-between), what happened was you intimidated people and got rid of them and then sold their land for high prices.

What's been the greatest difficulty you ever had to face?

The Sumiyoshi man replied: The hardest thing was whenever I had some personal problem. I couldn't rely on the organization and yet I couldn't damage the organization's face. For example, if you start fighting with other members, that's the most difficult.

How many times have you been in prison?

Four times, he said with his sad little smile.

Some Yakuza told me that the longer you're in prison, the more you're respected. Is that true?

Depends on your personality. Some people stay a long time in jail and nobody respects them.

Did you go to jail mainly for yourself or for the organization?

For myself.

Do you have any stories about that you wish to tell?

I was involved in a murder. —His eyes wrinkled up miserably, and he began

drawing invisible lines on the tablecloth. —But I don't want to tell about it.

What was it for?

It was territorial.

Were you the killer or were you just there?

Let's *say* I was just present, he replied, licking his lips anxiously.

How did you feel when your target died?

Well, nobody likes it.

Was it necessary?

Yeah, it was necessary, because otherwise you get killed, he said, so quiet and ruthless and weary.

That sounds the same as being a soldier in a war.

It's actually different. In the war your boss is the Emperor, and he's so far away, you can't see him. So it's not real to me. But in this case I knew the head. I did it for him.

If the target person comes to beg your organization's pardon, can you spare him?

Of course.

What's the most efficient way to kill a person?

Nowadays, it's just to shoot, he said with a quiet smile. But with a Japanese sword it's more scary. Cut him in the neck, down the side of the head. He bleeds to death. Blood splashes out, so there's almost no possibility of survival. That's also the best place to kill yourself.

If you had your life to live over again, would you be a Yakuza?

No, he said, staring at his skinny old fingers. I'd be a schoolteacher.

And what would you teach your students?

That the Yakuza is bad.

Then why have you stayed in the organization?

One reason is that I like the leader. Also, it's more easy for me to be here.

He could have meant that reply in either of two senses. Perhaps the Yakuza was his business now; it was his living; without that, he'd have to begin all over in his old age. Perhaps also it was that only the Yakuza accepted him. More than one Japanese has told me that if a child becomes a delinquent, he'll be ostracized forever. —In many cases, said my private detective, if you want to go out and lead a normal life, once your past is revealed they make you go away, because they are not as nice to you as before. —Where else could that would-be schoolteacher go now but to the Yakuza?

His cell phone rang just then. It was his "parent." He spoke anxiously, getting retroactive permission for the interview. I waited until he had finished. Then I asked: Do you believe that the purpose of your organization is for the strong to help the weak?

No, he said without a smile. That's an old story. The reality is different.

If you got 10,000,000 yen, what would you do with it?

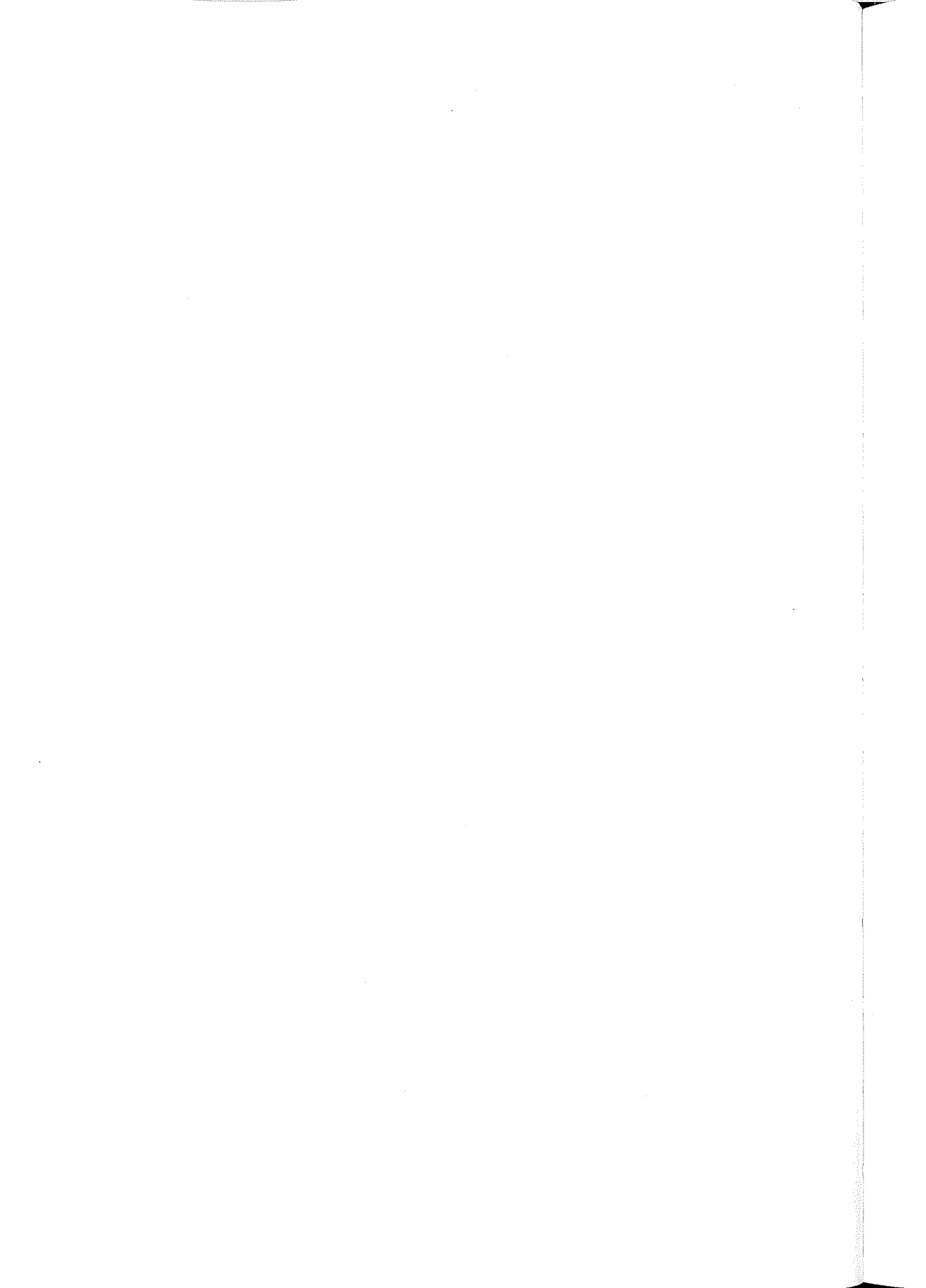
I'd gamble it away.

THE MODEST MAN OPENS HIS HEART

[MACHIYA FAMILY]

So the old Sumiyoshi man possessed hardly any "sense of belonging." The street agent had even less, which explains why he now lived unaffiliated. After I'd known him for two weeks I asked whether he was married, whether he had a girlfriend, and he answered no to each in tones of bitter resentment. So, as we saw, his half-hearted justification of the Yakuza was not romantic at all, but entirely utilitarian: It prevented anarchy. The old Sumiyoshi man and Mr. Suzuki had both told me that they'd joined not out of any fancy principle but for the same reason that most people do things: to get ahead in the world. Mr. Inoue had joined out of compulsion. And that quiet, modest man in the Machiya inner office had displayed a similarly practical streak when he asserted: It's commonly said that the Yakuza is a *negative service industry*, that when other people can't solve a problem, we do. —I told him that Mr. Suzuki had also said this, and he replied: Mr. Suzuki is a very wise man.

But then that modest man, thirty to forty percent of whose "children" had been to prison at least once, looked me in the face, smiled, and said: So basically our position is this. Although feared by society and hated by the police, we have our pride.



EUROPE

Where Are All the Pretty Girls? (1992)

The War Never Came Here (1994)

The Avengers of Kosovo (1998)



INTRODUCTION

All the case studies in this section have to do with one country—and the new nations and territories which broke away from it. Yugoslavia was never a nation as much as one of many experiments in confederation. We need only take a train across the central European plain to see that where Hungary ends and Serbia begins, to give but a single example, is from a topographic point of view arbitrary, subject to the vicissitudes of means and ends down the centuries. If some moral actor pushed his power across these flat fields, what would stop him from pushing further except for some local accident of defensive superiority? Regions seemed to preserve their identity more successfully than states and nations. The Austro-Hungarian Empire might come and go; Yugoslavia might assert its brief unitarism, but a Montenegrin remained a Montenegrin. And within these regions, which during the Yugoslavian¹ decades got called provinces, people attached themselves more fiercely than an American can readily imagine to the patch of homeland in which they were born.² In the second case study you will meet a man who explains: “In this country, when you build a house you build for life. After you, your sons and daughters will live on in that house.”³ You must keep this house-based, field-based, village-based conception of homeland in your mind to appreciate the anguish brought about by the forcible displacement of populations during the Yugoslavian civil war.

Like all generalizations about Yugoslavia, this one is largely false. Unfortunately, the violence which wrecked Yugoslavia cannot be understood as readily as the violence described in the two African case studies, where poverty and class jealousy stand out with the utmost obviousness. The words "Byzantine" and "balkanize" associate themselves with the history of eastern Europe for very good reason! Accordingly, all I can hope to do here is convey the urgency with which historical grievances can sometimes cry out long after the original protagonists have become dust in the cemeteries of homeland.

For example, the Serbian emotionalism over Kosovo goes back to 1389, when Prince Lazar died in battle against the Turks. To Serbs, the Albanian majority in Kosovo descends from or derives from those same Turks. From the Albanian point of view, the fact that they are indeed the majority renders Serbian authority over what technically remains a Serbian province illegitimate.

Thus the conflict in Kosovo may be seen as opposing defenses of homeland ("Kosovo is our Jerusalem," say the Serbs, while the Albanians say, "We are the ones who live here!"), of race and culture—which in turn explains why that homeland cannot be shared; of creed (Serbian Orthodox *versus* Muslim) and of authority, which demands: Is Kosovo to remain a part of Yugoslavia, in which case it's a province, a dependency, or will it become its own country, or even perhaps, as Serbs fear, a dependency of Greater Albania?

Kosovo also raises the grimmest questions about proportionality, discrimination, and the allowable limits of war aims,⁴ which have in turn been culturally conditioned by Yugoslavia's horrific history of war.

Just as Kosovo cannot be understood without reference to 1389, the civil war described in the first two case studies takes its context from 1941-45. That is why you may wish to browse through Annex E: "Ethnic Relations in Yugoslavia During World War II." In the case studies, you'll find that people continually justify their hatreds on the basis of what the Croatian "Ustashas" did to the Serbs, what the Serbian "Chetniks" did to the Muslims, etcetera. In Yugoslavia, the past remains fatally alive.

Annexes F and G present two opposing points of view as to how the Bosnian war began. One is from a Serbian perspective; its complement is a Muslim's version. The Serb had a very high position of power at the time she explained her interpretation of events: In fact, she was none other than Biljana Plavsic, then the Acting Vice President of the Bosnian Serbs. After the Dayton Accords stalemated the Bosnian war by means of a partition which seems unlikely to last down the ages, Ms. Plavsic briefly became an official leader in the new Bosnian Serb Republic; she now resides at the Hague, serving a stiff sentence for war crimes. As for the Muslim, she was anonymous and by her own request nameless. I met her in a camp for displaced persons in Croatia.

Finally, Annex D is a letter from the inmates of the *studenski dom* in Sarajevo. Their plight receives discussion in the first case study. (What should I say about

them here? My publisher, Mr. Dave Eggers, who is in fact a very big-hearted, generous, empathetic man, read my account and inserted this comment: "At this point a reader wants to know more about why the students, as noncombatants, stay in this building, which seems extraordinarily dangerous." It is, and I also want to know why, and so did the students, but there was nobody to ask except God. Their plight was almost ordinary.)⁵ The letter itself is much shorter than its signature pages. The terrible year 1992 has dwindled away from these people now; they live on or they have died. This letter accordingly means nothing. Their names mean nothing today as they meant nothing before to the evil men and women whose policies locked them fast to the front line of a besieged city. Let them stand in for all the other people whose names have meant nothing to war criminals.

As you read these Yugoslavian case studies, ask yourself: What is legitimate defense of homeland here, and what pretends to be? What defines the ethos of each of the three sides, and to what extent does it exclude the ethos of others? How many of the Maxims for Murderers in our moral calculus⁶ can you see winking cynically at you from these pages? Who seems to be respecting the moral limits of warfare, and who does not? Above all, how much do you know and how much must you take on faith? One person sees so little in a war! What I have seen I will tell you. It remains your task as a citizen of this earth to weigh claim against counterclaim.

How much should history weigh on us in our judgment of a violence which constantly appeals to history? The first case study begins *after* Croatia and Bosnia, among other republics, have already declared independence from the republic called Yugoslavia, whose capital lies in Serbia and whose army and government seem to be increasingly dominated by Serbs. The official moral actors: Tudjman in Croatia, Izetbegovic in Bosnia, Milosevic in Yugoslavia. Milosevic has gone to the Kosovo battlefield monument, invoked Prince Lazar, and threateningly promised to protect the rights of Serbs. Tudjman for his part upholds the cause of Croatian rights a bit too stridently. Izetbegovic's stance on behalf of his Muslim constituency reminds his neighbors, irrationally or not, of the ancient nightmare of Turkish domination. On all three sides, defense of authority has become defense of race, a particularly absurd category in Yugoslavia, where strangers must sometimes ask one another's last names to know whether or not they are supposed to kill them. Polarization breaks out like an infection in ethnically mixed towns; neighbor rapes neighbor; neighbor cuts neighbor's throat.

Slovenia has already seceded from Yugoslavia, and gotten away with it. When Croatia announces the same intention, Croatia's old friend West Germany instantly recognizes her independence, thereby adding to Serbs' fears that the Ustashas will arise from the past like vampires and once again begin to collect jars of Serbian eyeballs—Milosevic decides not to let them go. War begins.⁷

Impelled by his own fears, which Serbian threats in part justify, Izetbegovic also declares independence. War spreads.

"Where Are All The Pretty Girls?" takes place in 1992, during the height of the Serbian siege of Sarajevo, a city once renowned for its cosmopolitanism and now the capital and symbol of Muslim Bosnia. Meanwhile, the anti-Serbian coalition between Muslims and Croats has begun to fracture. Croatia, riddled with fear and quiet frenzy, awaits the outcome of its battles. On the streets of Zagreb one frequently sees members of the Croatian Party of Rights, which was founded in the Hitler era and carried out atrocities against Serbs and Muslims. (See Annex E.) One also finds people who still fondly remember their Serbian and Muslim friends, but there seem to be fewer and fewer of those. Meanwhile, the short-lived Serbian Republic of Krajina has given birth to itself just east of Croatian-held territory. The Croats will obliterate it in 1995.

"The War Never Came Here" is set in 1994, when the Serbs have begun losing the war in earnest, and the rift, in Bosnia at least, between Muslims and Croats is emblemized by the divided city of Mostar, whose less damaged western half remains in Croat hands; the eastern, Muslim half was savaged twice, first by Serbs, then by Croats. In what remains of Yugoslavia, which is to say Serbia and Montenegro, militant defiance unites the people against the internationalists' "surgical strikes," while the struggle between moderates and extremists divides them. Relations between Serbs and ethnic Albanians deteriorate in Kosovo. In Croatia, the Party of Rights continues to profess its own extremist program and carry it out on the battlefield, but its influence seems to be waning as the military situation improves; it was never the ruling party in any event. In this case study even more than the two others, we can see how deterrence, retribution and revenge⁸ against ancient injuries inevitably creates new injuries to avenge—unless and until a moral actor passes up his own turn to do harm.

"The Avengers of Kosovo" was written in 1998, one year before a NATO offensive will strip from Serbia all but nominal authority over the disputed province of the title. The civil war is over; Croatia is beginning to recover; Bosnia remains divided into ineffectual ethnic-based sub-republics, but at least the mass atrocities there are over; as for Yugoslavia, of which now only Serbia and Montenegro are left, that sad land, still impoverished and isolated by international sanction, continues to self-destruct, with the same ugly ethnic conflicts now taking place in Kosovo, Serb against Albanian, the Serbs outnumbered, the Albanians outgunned, the killings and mutilations continuing on, NATO's bombers about to come.

THE ULTRA-BALKANIZATION OF YUGOSLAVIA

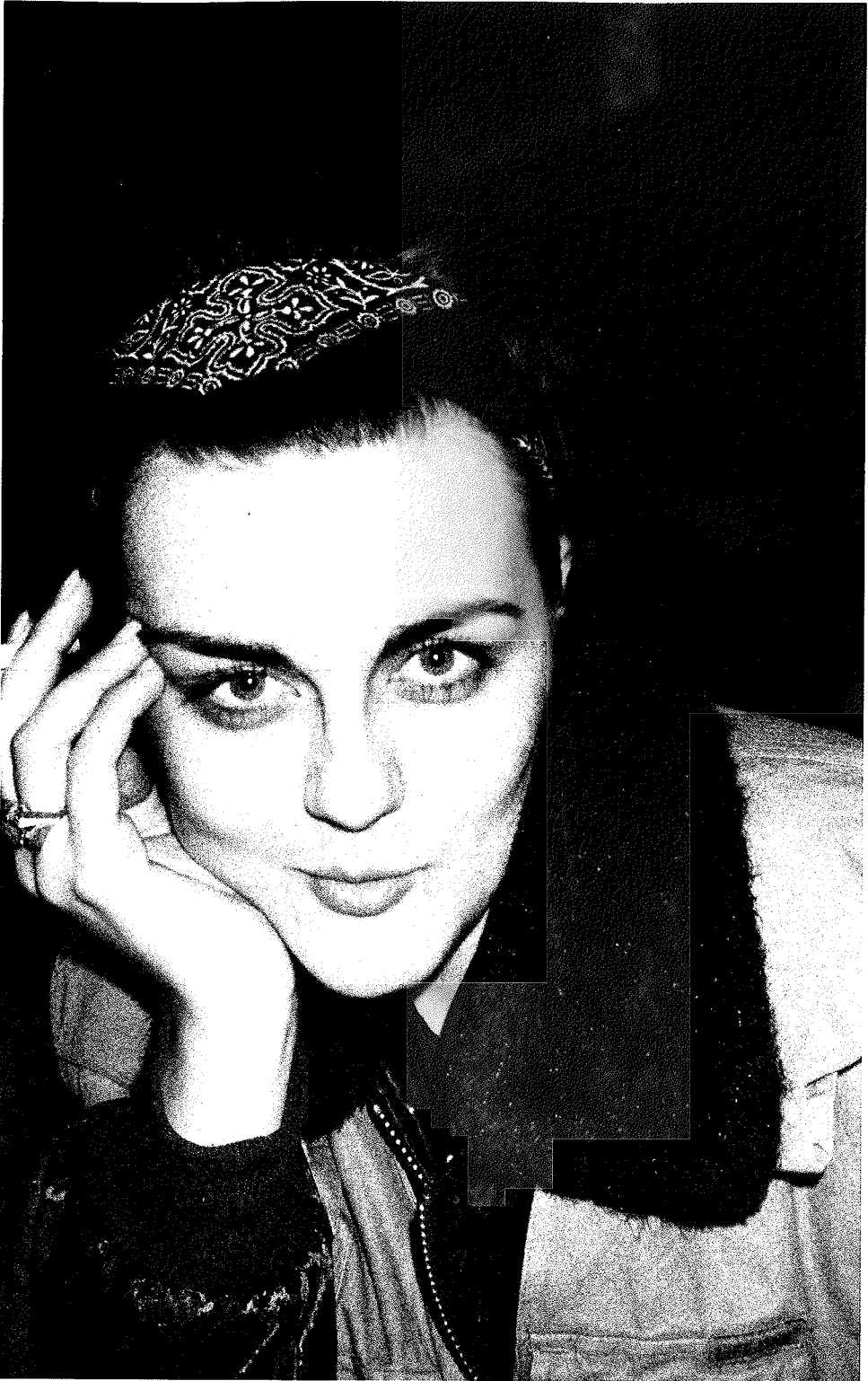
1994-1998

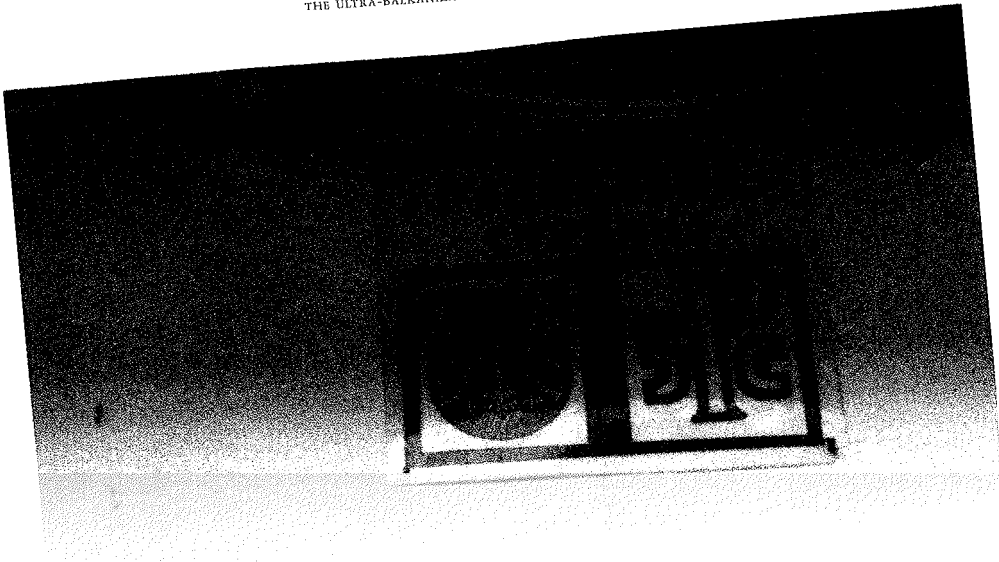
Moving thematically rather than chronologically, these photographs depict the soldiers and nationalists of all three sides, and ruinscapes of the country they destroyed.

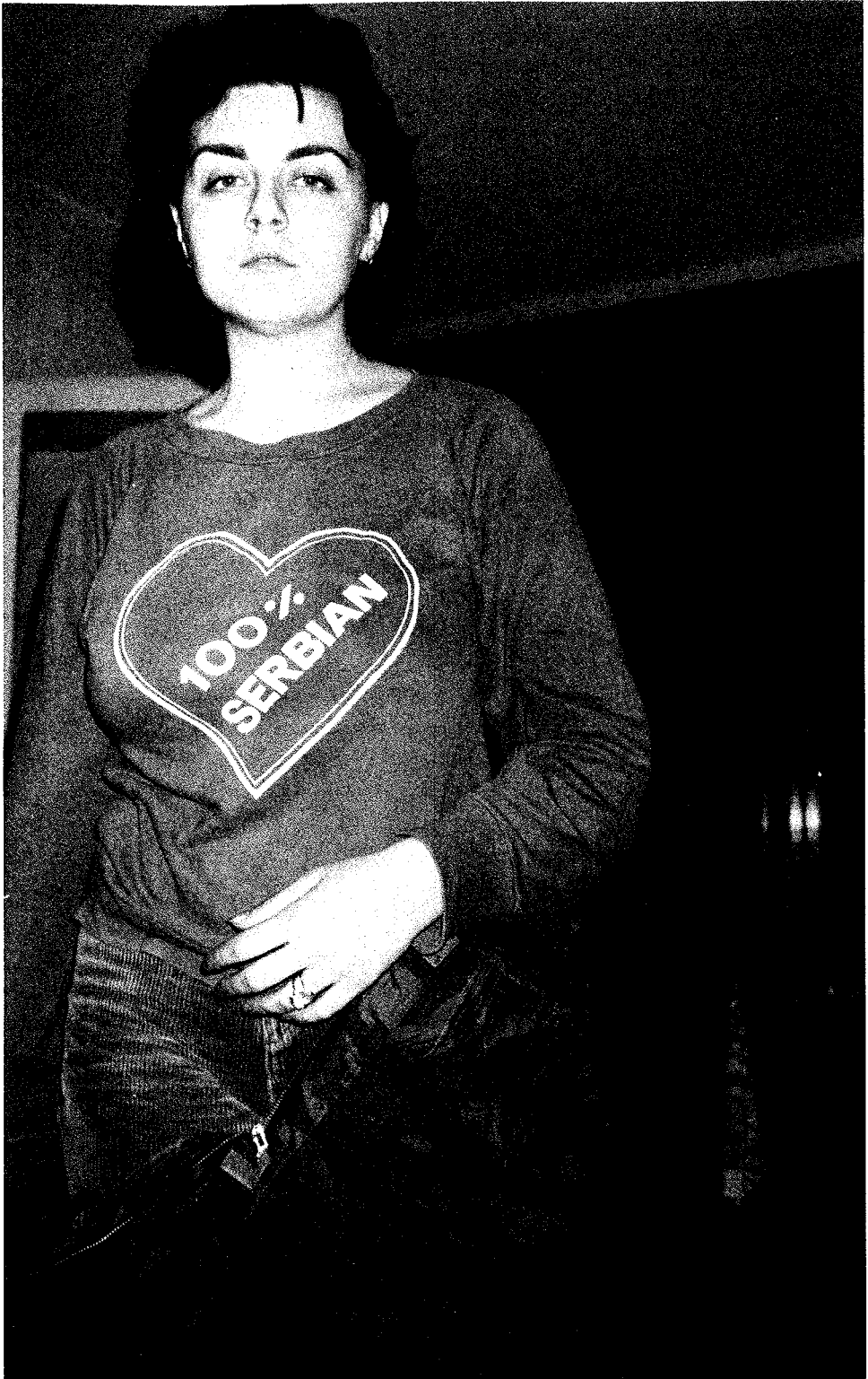
334. My friend Vineta, Beograd, 1994. She was Montenegrin but identified very closely with Serbian nationalist aspirations.
335. Vineta beneath the poster of her party, the Srbska Radikalna Stranka (SRS), Novi Pazar, Sanzак, Serbia, Yugoslavia, 1994.
- 336-38. Vineta in her Russian acquaintance's Serbian Special Forces uniform, Beograd, 1994. The likeness of the SRS leader, Vojislav Seselj, hangs on the door.
- 339-40. Vineta at Kosovo Battlefield Monument, 1998. In the first photo, she poses with Serbian soldiers, making the "Serb sign." In the second she stands alone. The four "C"s above the sword abbreviate the famous slogan: "Only unity saves the Serbs."
341. Vineta in Pristina, Kosovo, 1998, making the Serb sign, with the same four "C"s graffitied on the wall behind her.
342. These buttons for sale in Beograd show what the Serbs thought of Americans in 1998.
343. Biljana Plavsic, then Vice President of the Bosnian Serbs, Beograd, 1994. The U.S. supported her leadership after the Dayton Accords. Later she surrendered to The Hague on a war crimes charge. She is now in prison.
344. Ms. Plavsic's counterpart, Dobroslav Paraga, who headed the Croatian Party of Right, HSP, and its private

- army, HOS. This portrait was taken in Zagreb in 1994. Behind Mr. Paraga are the names of HOS fighters who were killed in action against Serbs.
345. Vandalized HSP posters, Split, 1994. "Za Dom Spremni," the HSP slogan, means "Ready for the Homeland."
 346. HSP member in his home, Split, 1994. The portrait on the wall is Ante Pavelic's. Pavelic was appointed by the Fascists to head the "Independent State of Croatia" during World War II. During his tenure, hundreds of thousands of Serbs were murdered. Pavelic was an HSP leader, and he coined the slogan "Za Dom Spremni."
 347. Bosnian Croat (HVO) fighter and child, West Mostar, 1994.
 348. Apartment complex shelled by Croats, West Mostar, 1994. One Croat explained that the building had served as a "Muslim propaganda station." This disgusted me. Later on, in 1998, my government similarly destroyed a "Serbian propaganda station" in Beograd, killing one young woman who was working late.
 349. Bridge to East Mostar, 1994. Destroyed by Croats and Serbs.
 350. Muslim fighter, East Mostar, 1994.
 351. Two slain American journalists, boundary between East and West Mostar, 1994.
 - 352a. Interior of a house where a family of Kosovar Albanians had once lived. The man of the house was a member of the insurgent UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army), whose pro-Albanian violence was directed against Serbs. The blood and clothes on the floor belonged to the man's father, murdered by Serbs. Photograph taken west of the now Albanian village of Glavotina, 1998.
 - 352b. A man in the rival Serbian town of Priluzje pointing to the "bunkers" of the UCK in Glavotina, 1998. The bunkers were in fact ruined houses, which did serve well enough for sniping.
 353. Serbian woman and child, Priluzje, 1998. In 2001, after NATO invaded Kosovo, I had the opportunity of speaking with an Albanian activist from Pristina, which lies very close to both Priluzje and Glavotina. I asked him what had happened to the Serbs of Priluzje. Smilingly, he denied ever having heard of the place.

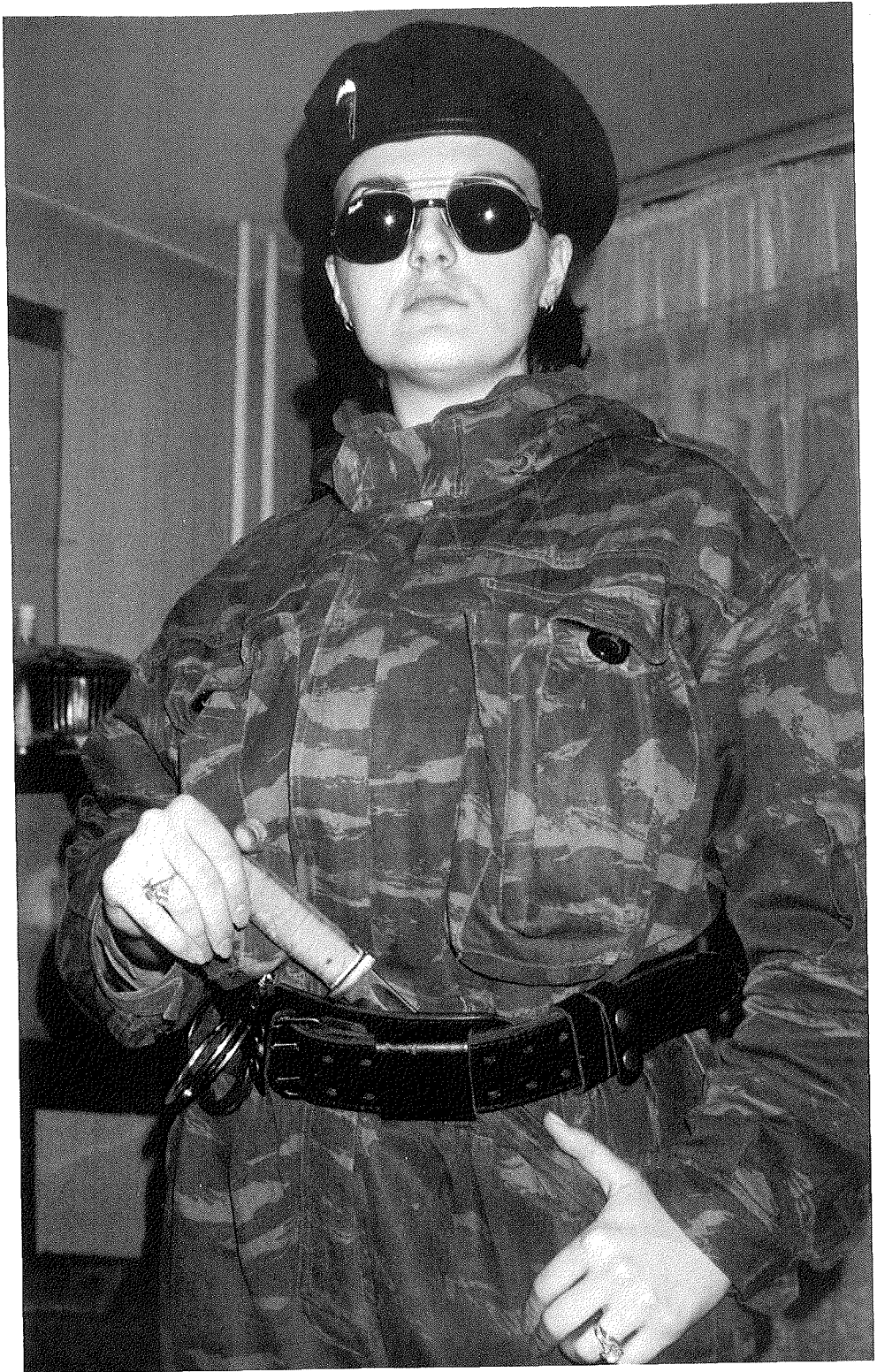
354. Serb in Priluzje, wounded by UCK fighters near Glavotina, 1998.
355. Serbian paramilitary, Priluzje, 1998.
356. Serbian schoolboys in Priluzje with bullet shot into their school from Glavotina, 1998.
357. A boy in Glavotina making the UCK sign, 1998.
358. Monument to recently slain UCK fighters, Glavotina, 1998.
359. UCK insurgent, Kosovo, 1998. He was the one whose father's murdered blood is depicted on p. 352.
360. Old woman from Glavotina, 1998. One of her relatives, an UCK fighter, had just been killed by Serbs.
361. Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) fighter and child, Kosovo, 1998.
362. A man in his house, which had been destroyed by Serbs. Glavotina, 1998.
363. The same story. Glavotina, 1998.
- 364a. Vineta in Pristina, 1998, with graffiti: "I'm Not Just Perfect: I'm Serb Too!"
- 364b. Muslim by SDA graffiti, East Mostar, 1994. The Society for Democratic Action was the main Muslim political arm.

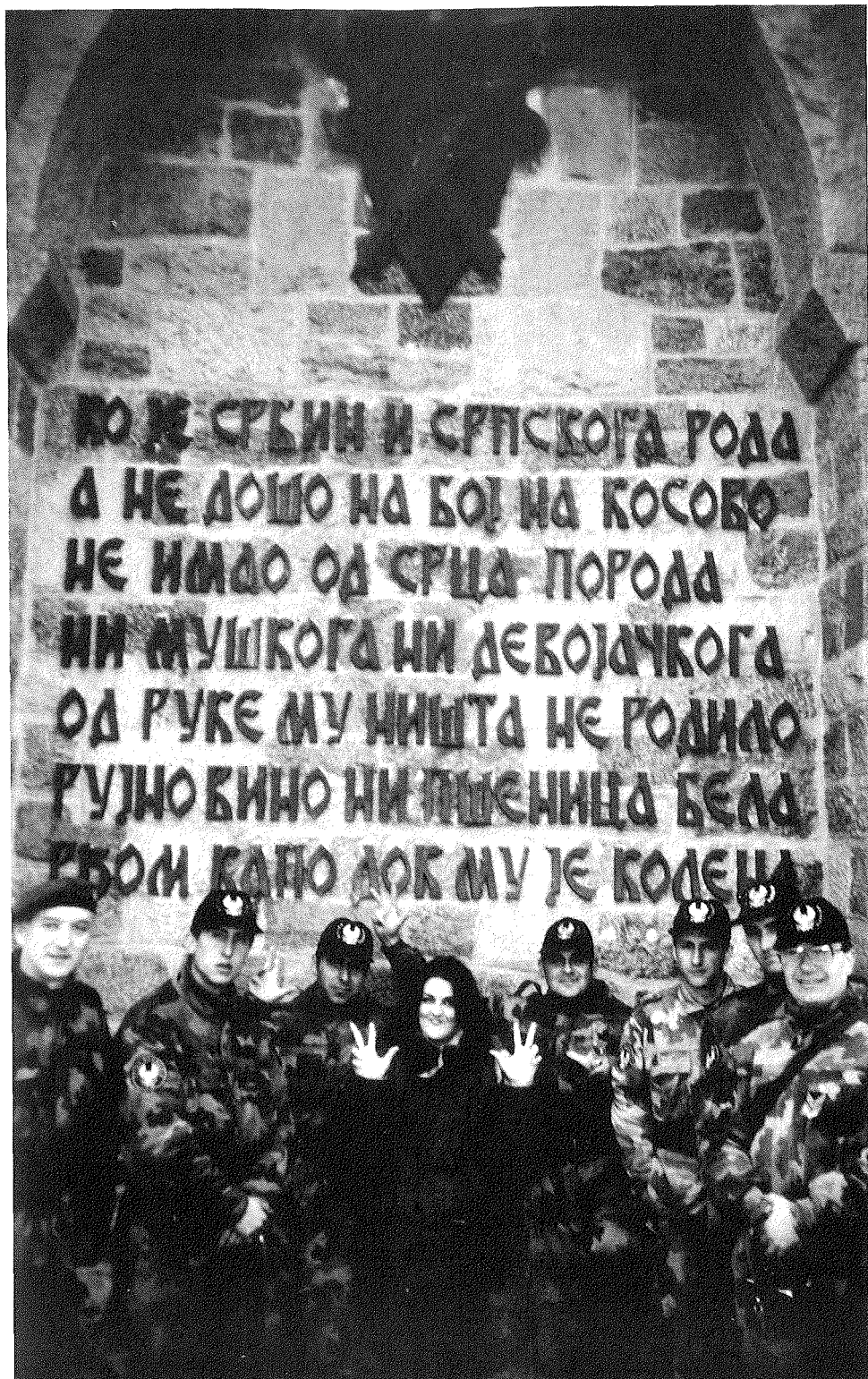












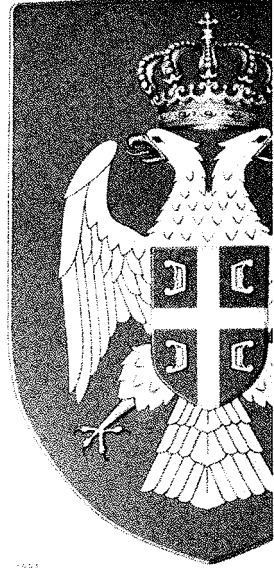






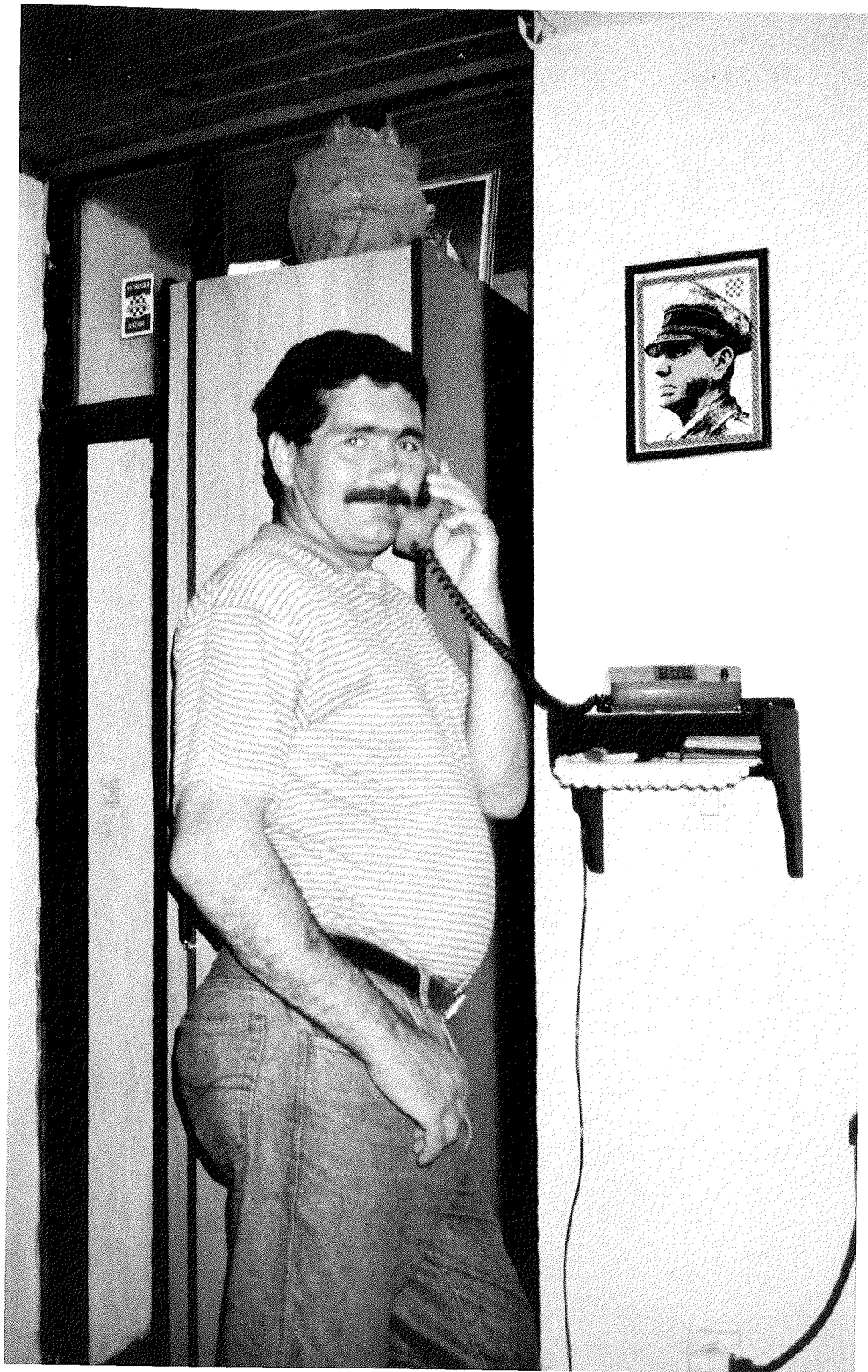


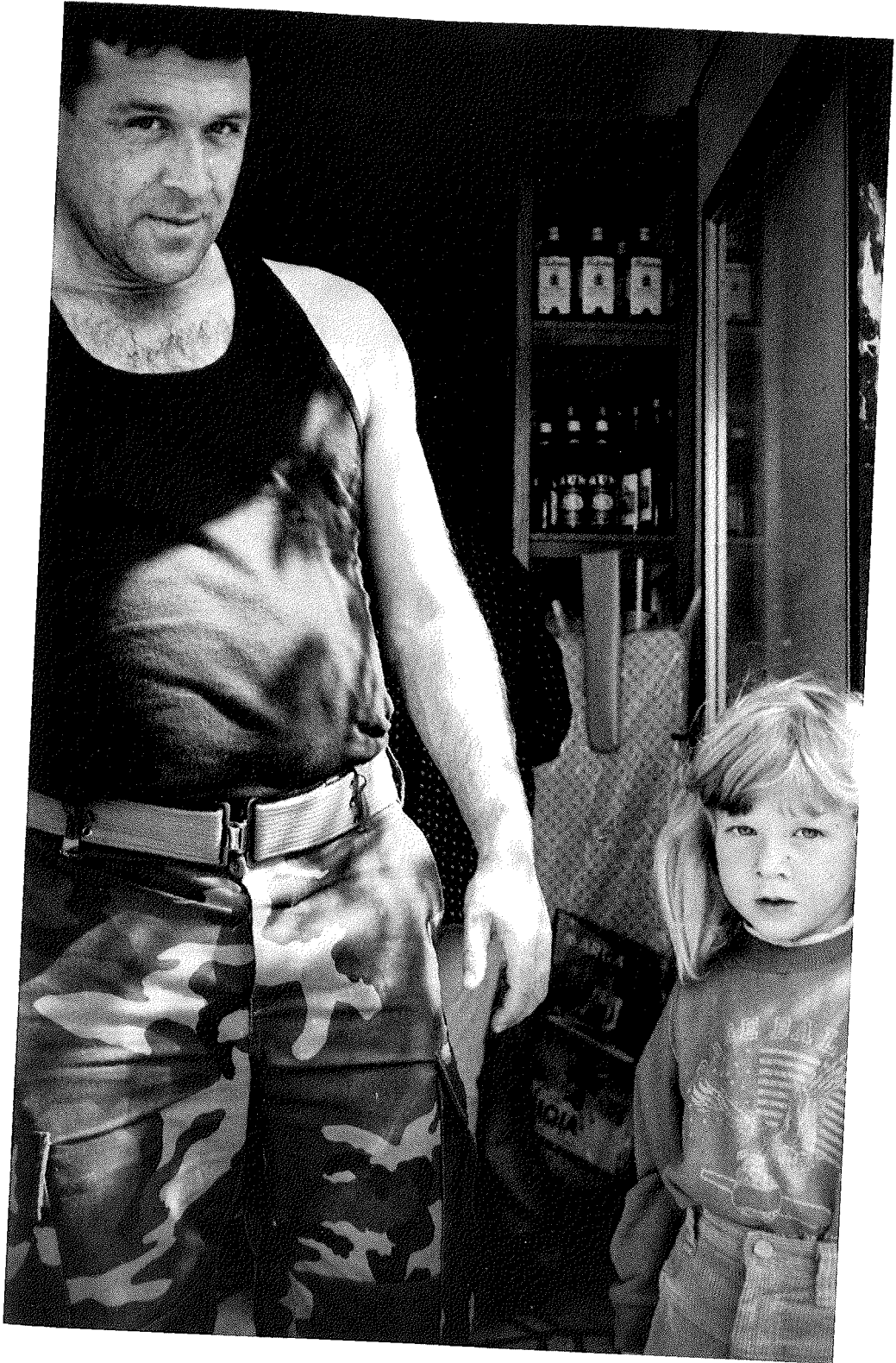
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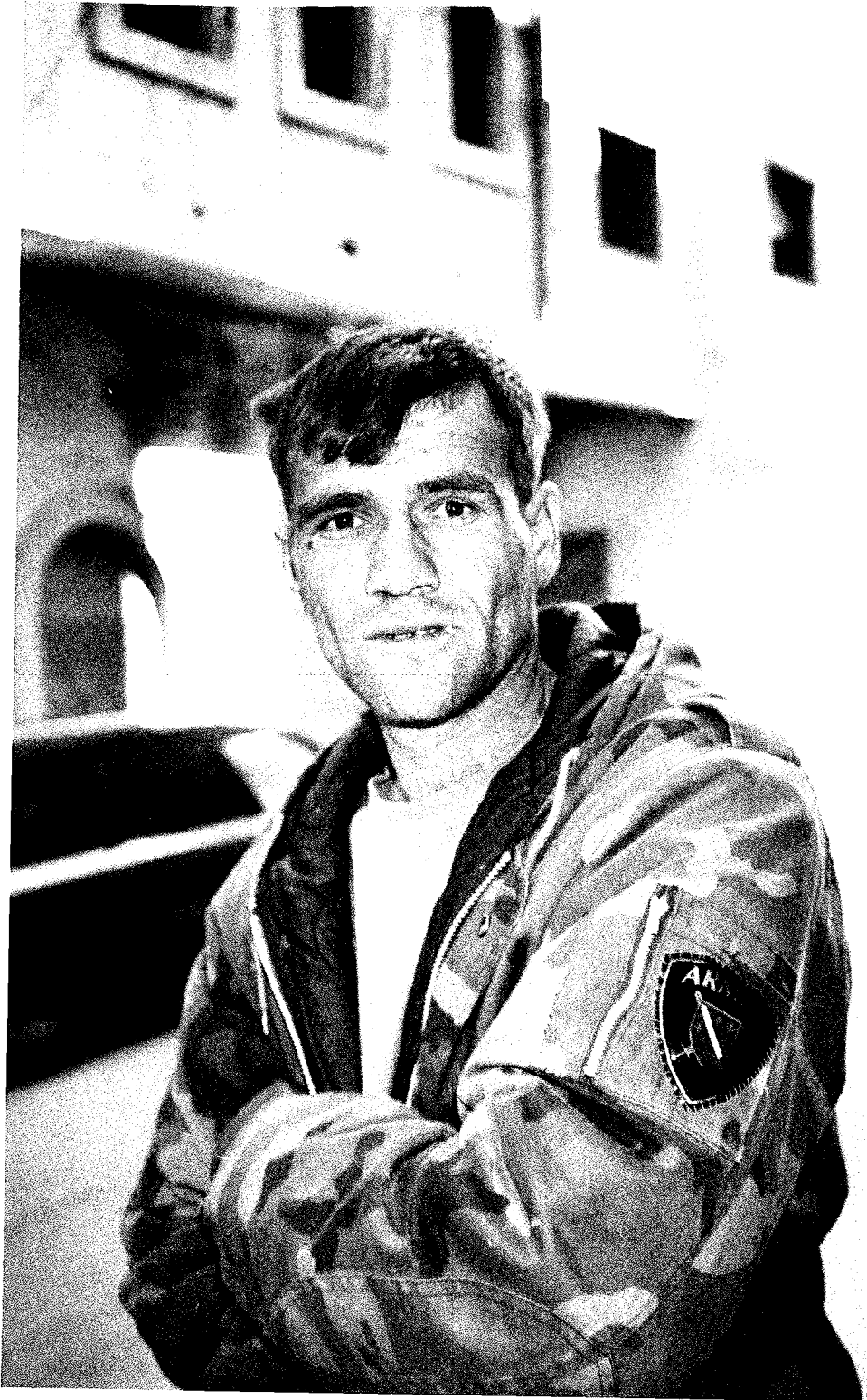


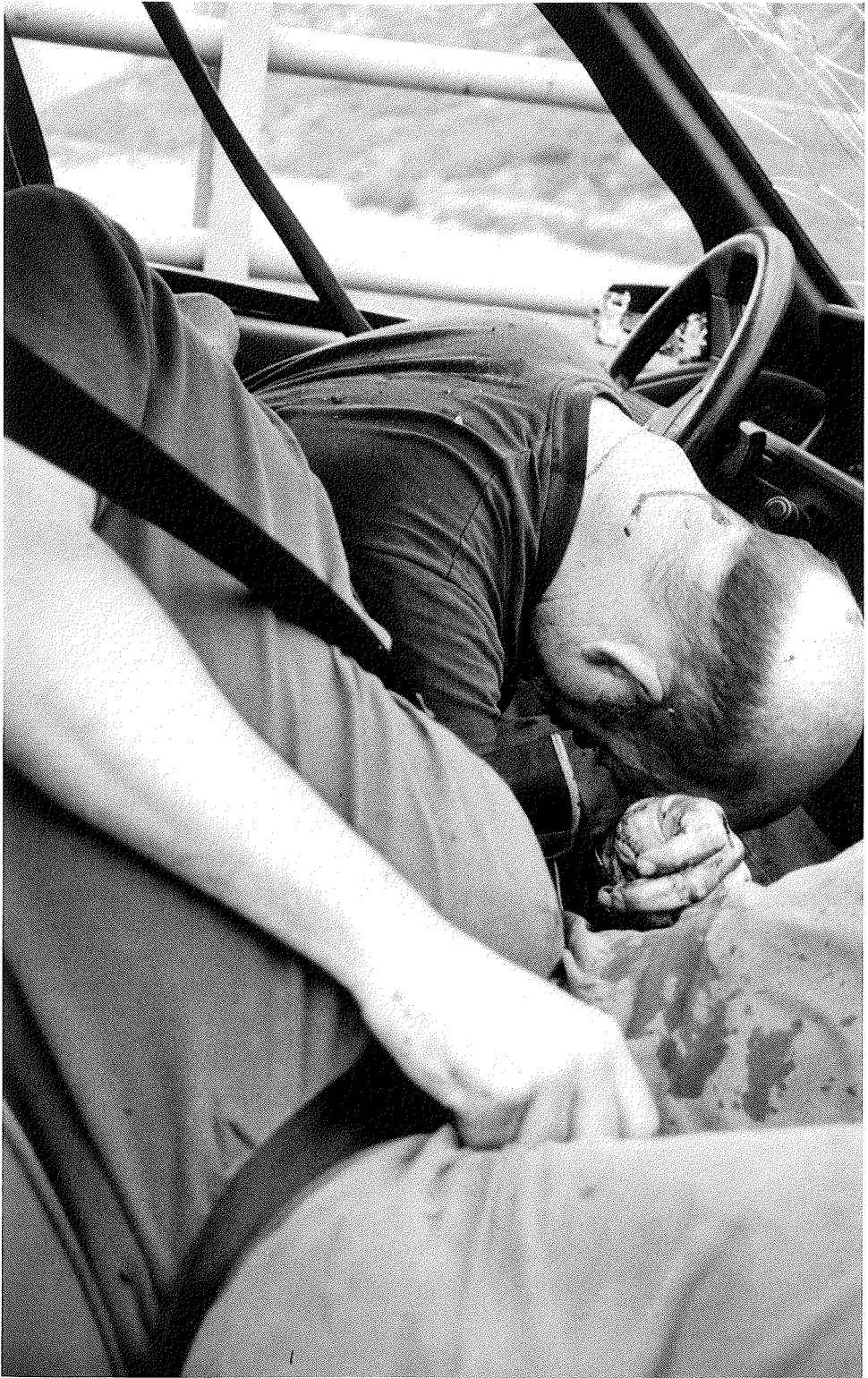










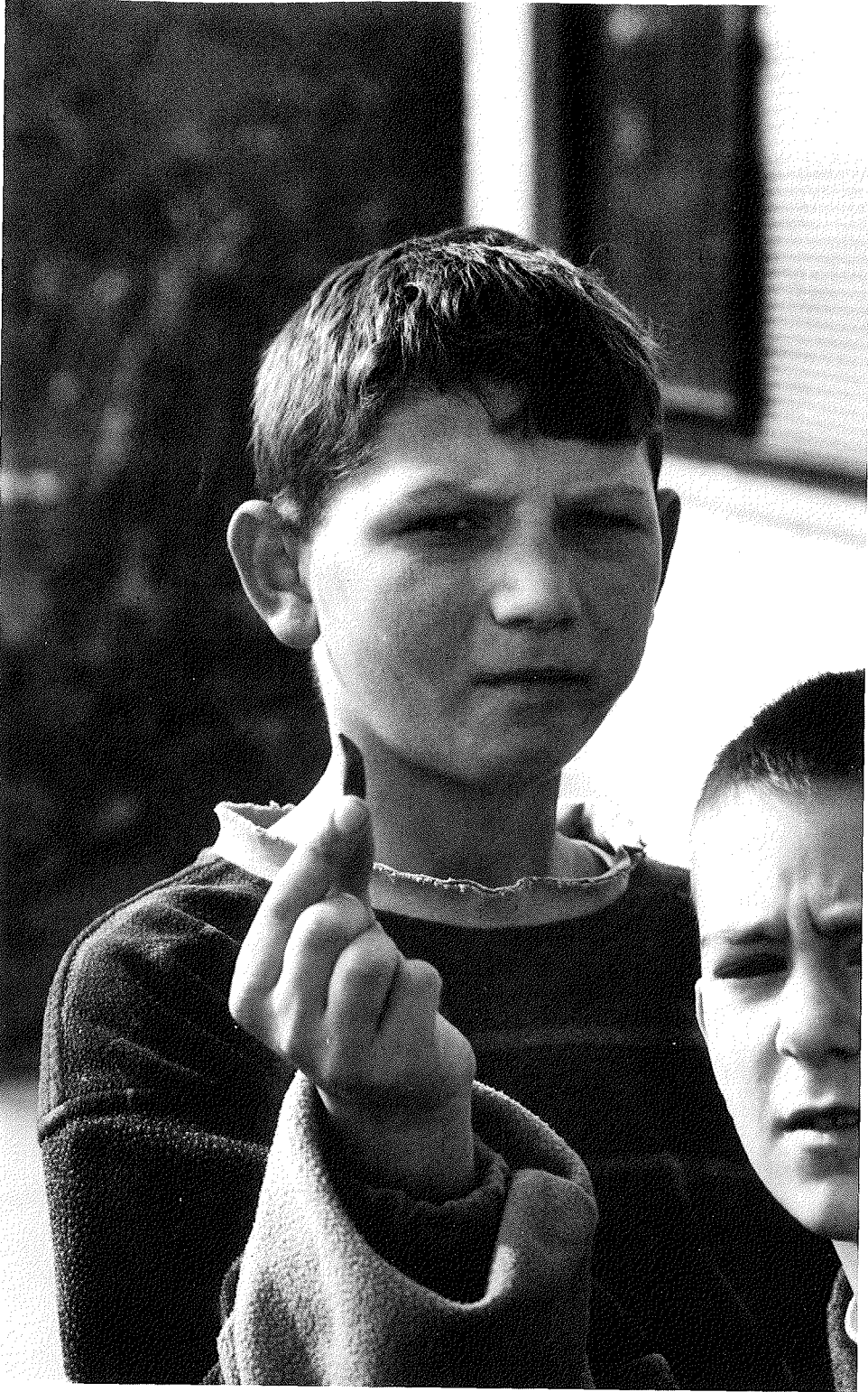


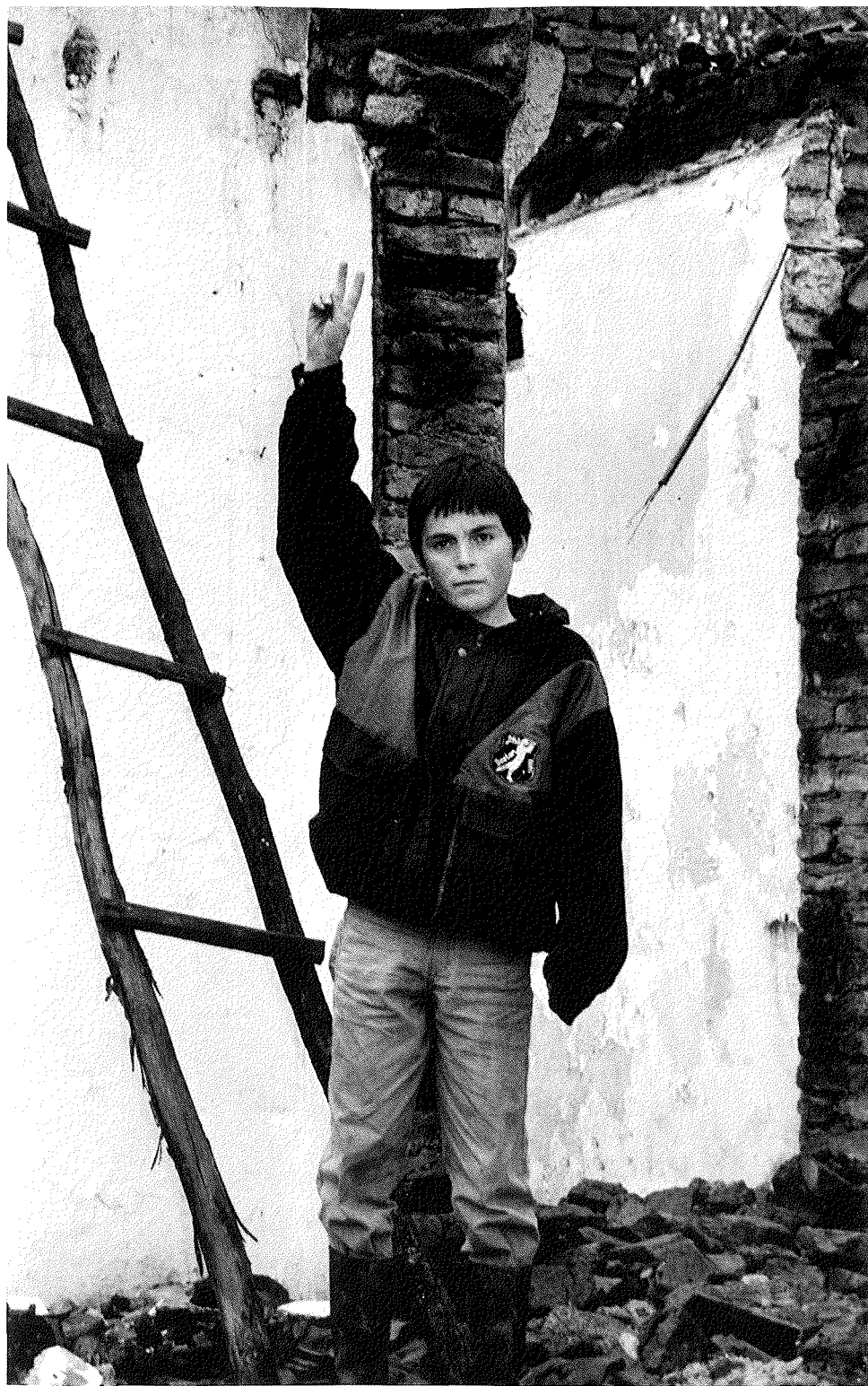


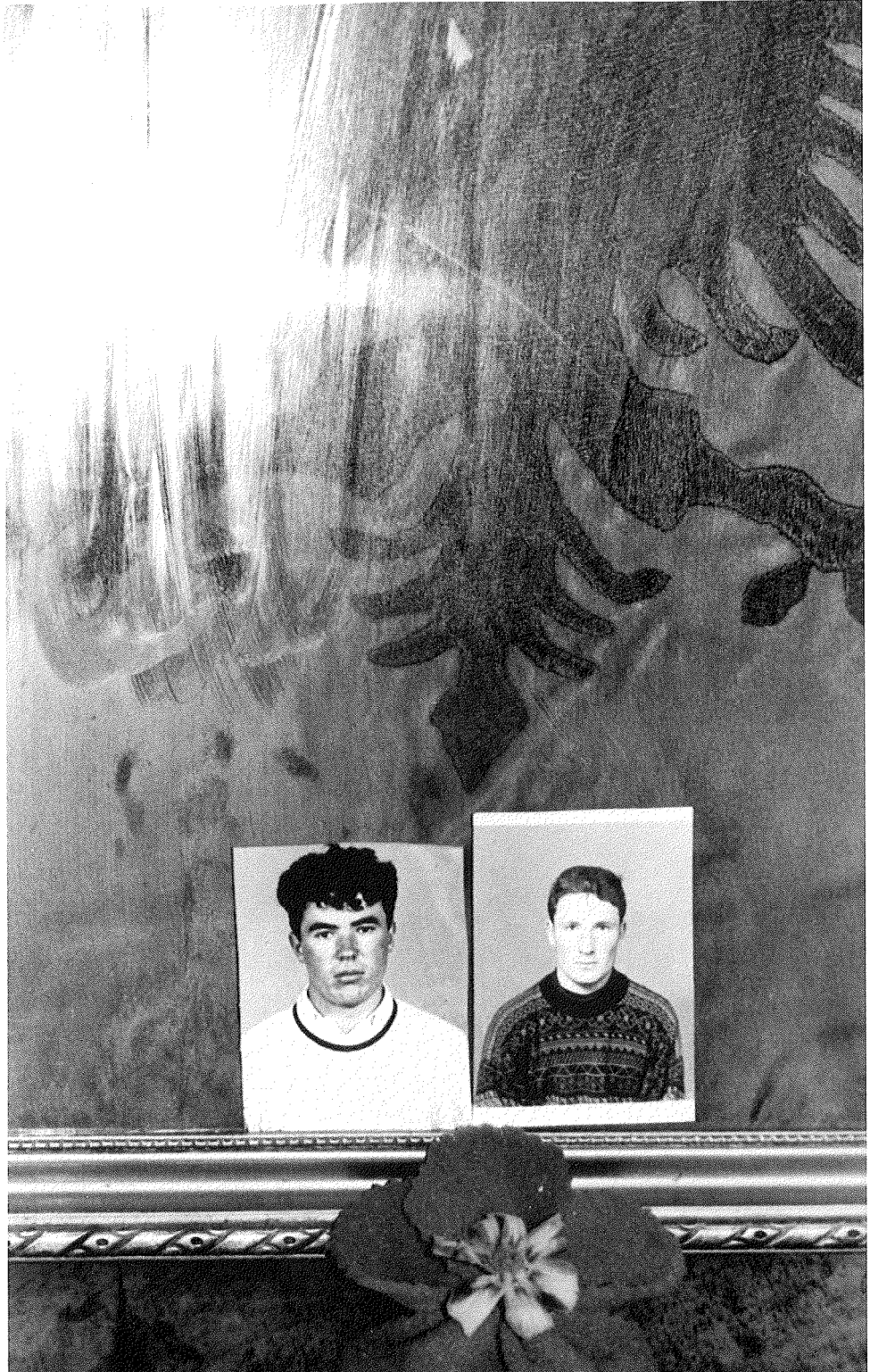








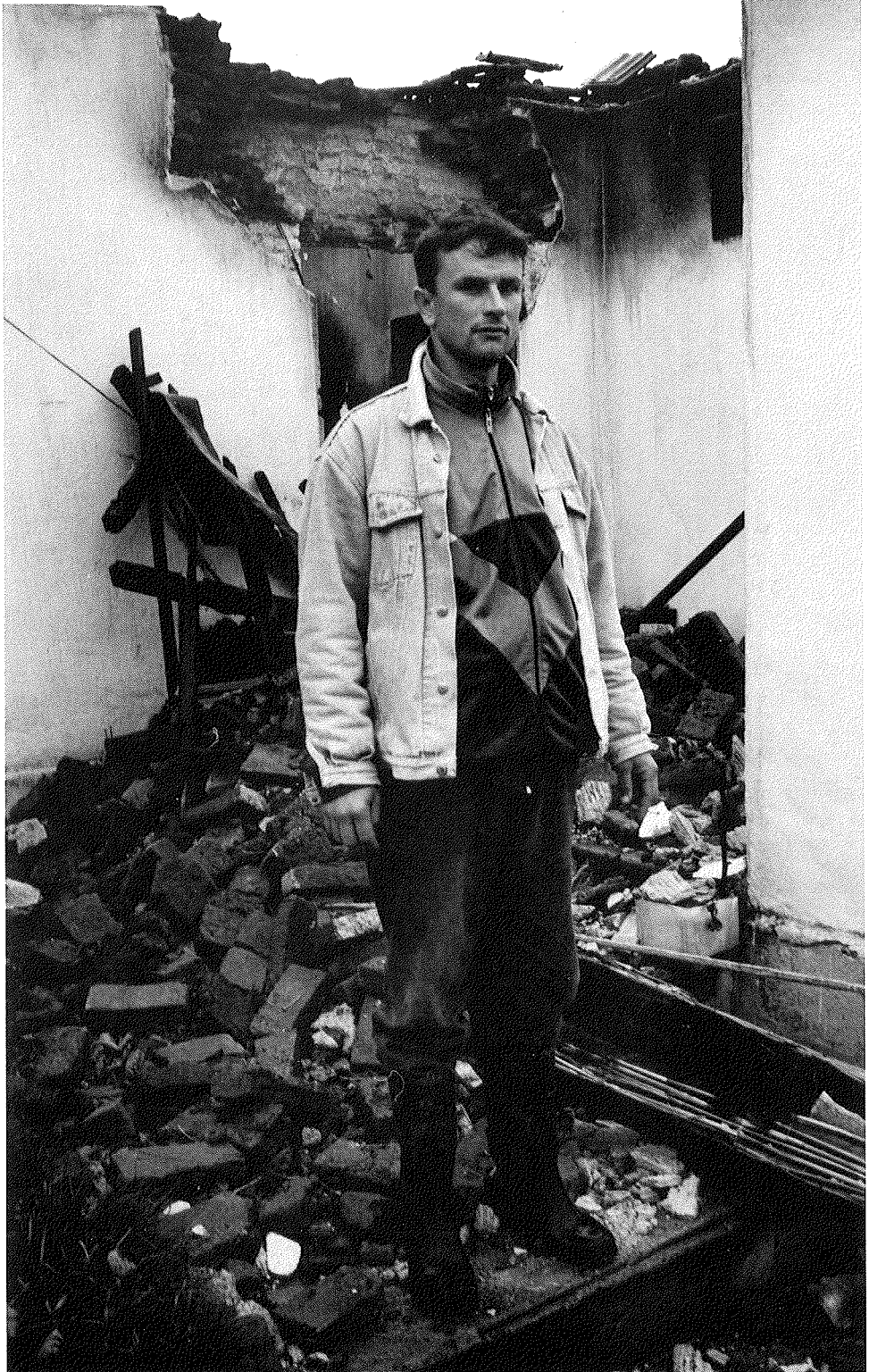


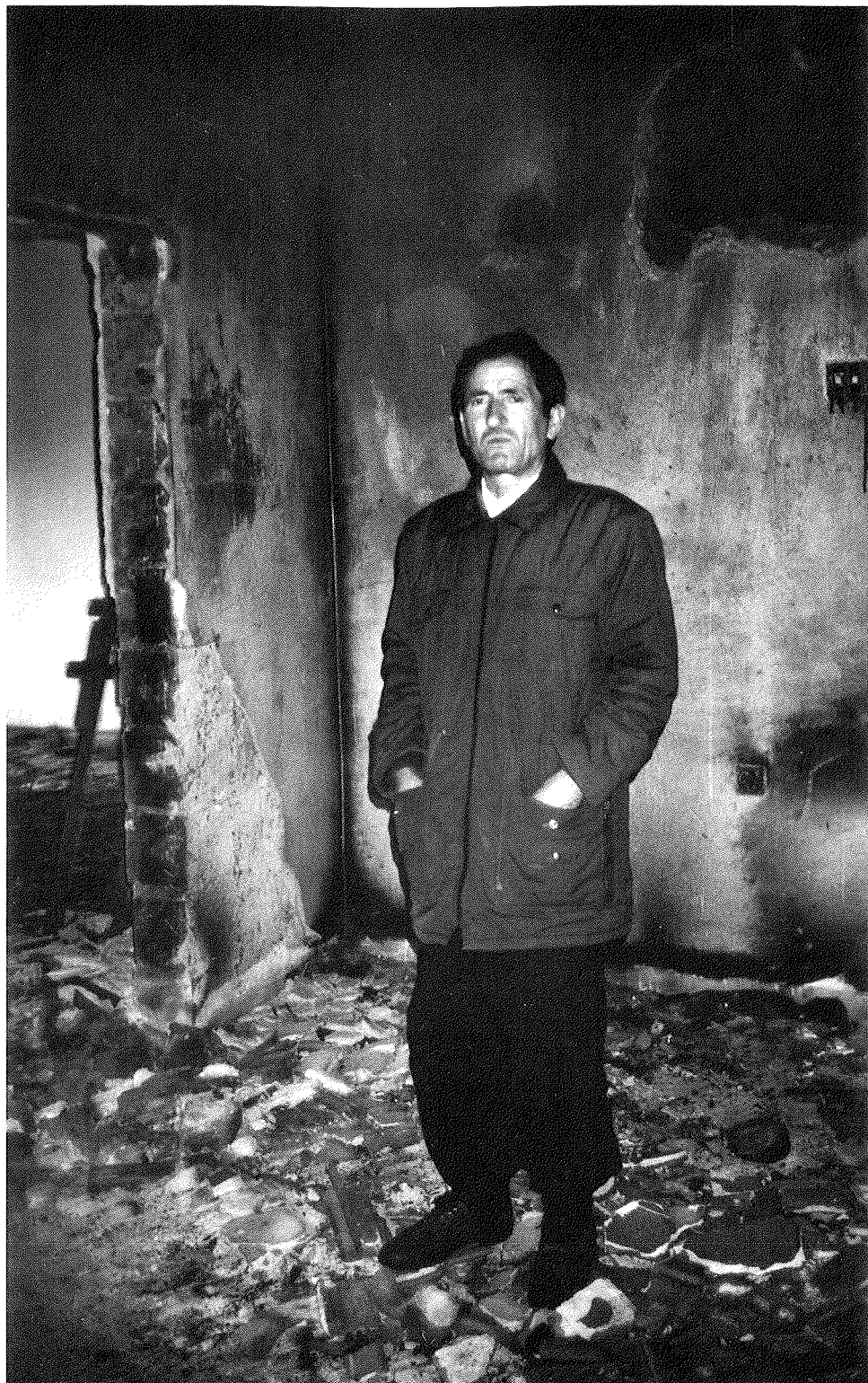














WHERE ARE ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS? (1992)

ZAGREB, REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

MEN IN UNIFORM

One day in the park it was very hot, and the almost barkless state of the ocher-colored trees was like the paint peeling on the benches, like the ocher-colored leaves that scraped occasionally across the asphalt or just lay clutching with outstretched points. It was the middle of the afternoon. A boy stood calling to his playmate, staring and scratching his throat. The other boy came on a bicycle, and they went away together. A cloud of dead leaves blew suddenly with a sound like lizard skins being pulverized. Two pigeons pecked in the dead leaves that covered the steps of the bandstand. Across the street, a man in a blue-grey uniform lounged against a car, his foot welded to his knee. He called to another man dressed the same way. At once a third man in blue-grey came walking through the park very rapidly with his walkie-talkie out and his hand on a holstered gun. Then he was gone. A man in camouflage fatigues passed more slowly, carrying a leather briefcase. There was a girl who rode her friend on the handlebars of her bike facing her; those two rode round

and round. A woman with long tanned legs passed, smoking a cigarette. People in their summer clothes entered the patch of bleached light at the middle of the square, and an old man bowed himself over a drinking fountain. For a moment I thought that there were no men in uniform anymore. But then another one came.

Across from the bookstore where I'd once bought Communist-flavored children's books (eleven years ago now, just after Tito died), a young couple sat on a bench, the woman scissoring her knees to bring coolness inside her sweaty dress; and white-winged black bugs kept landing on me and crawling on my sticky skin, so I got up and walked away past quadruple-storied facades, one a bleached chlorine-green, the next pale yellow, the third chrome yellow, all as clean as if they'd been carved out of soap; and past the sloping grey awnings where people took their drinks in the shadow of a saber-pointing horseman long since petrified, I saw a campaign poster for the Croatian Party of Rights. Paraga, their leader, looked handsome, determined, somewhat effete. (Someone who'd known him in college said that he had been nice but perhaps a bit quiet.) Paraga's army was called HOS,¹ the Croatian Defense Force. Their slogan was **READY FOR THE HOME!**² A HOS poster two steps away showed two brawny tattooed men in black uniforms, their arms upraised in a Nazi salute. Of course the Romans had saluted in the same way. Maybe I ought to make allowances, as I already had for the T-shirts that said **GOD AND CROATIA** (I had nothing against either of those quantities). Anyway, Paraga had lost the election overwhelmingly.

That evening when I heard the organ notes twisting and rising through the green-oxidized doors of the cathedral I thought: Why not God and Croatia? The music in those old ocher walls, still warm from the sun, vibrated with a painful beauty like droplets of summer darkness dripping from copper flowers. (I remembered the flowers I'd seen in the empty restaurants. Not very many people in Zagreb had the money to eat out.) The sacristan watched me from behind his gratinged and arched window. I opened the door, and the music stopped. I didn't go in. I heard a page turning, and then the organ filled me with sweetness again as the sacristan closed the door in my face and bolted it. On the black steps which resembled lava, cool air and music issued from the cracks in the door along with the old mortar-smell peculiar to churches. The music appeared to be talking to itself, ready for any death.

I don't remember this scaffolding, I said to a man in uniform. Is the cathedral being restored?

In a manner of speaking. The Serbs bombed it. They love to target monuments.

On one of the walls hung a great cross plaited with the barbed wire of agony, and fresh roses in a plastic cup. I thought again of the flowers in the empty restaurants. I thought of how written on a long yellow wall over and over I'd seen **CRO** and **VUKOVAR** (the latter sometimes inside a heart). I was glad I had not had to see the ruins at Vukovar. I'd kept walking until I saw the expected swastikas. The swastikas were a curse upon the Serbs.

Anyhow, the Serbs were not bombing Zagreb anymore. They never really had. Those blasts had been mere episodes, compared to the sniping. In short, the city was safe. You had to drive half an hour to get to the place where last week a Croatian girl had been found raped with her throat cut. In the street-bulge in front of the church, frowning dark faces were vomiting pure water endlessly, and around them sat people undressed for summer and above them stood gilded angels holding crosses so powerfully. The brown water rippled yellow in the sunset. The bells rang. The church door opened. Old women in black came out. They walked down the street, past another HOS poster.

Later, when I was in the Serbian Republic of Krajina, my police translator claimed that HOS built and controlled concentration camps for Serbs, just like in Germany in the Second World War.

Have you seen those camps yourself? I said.

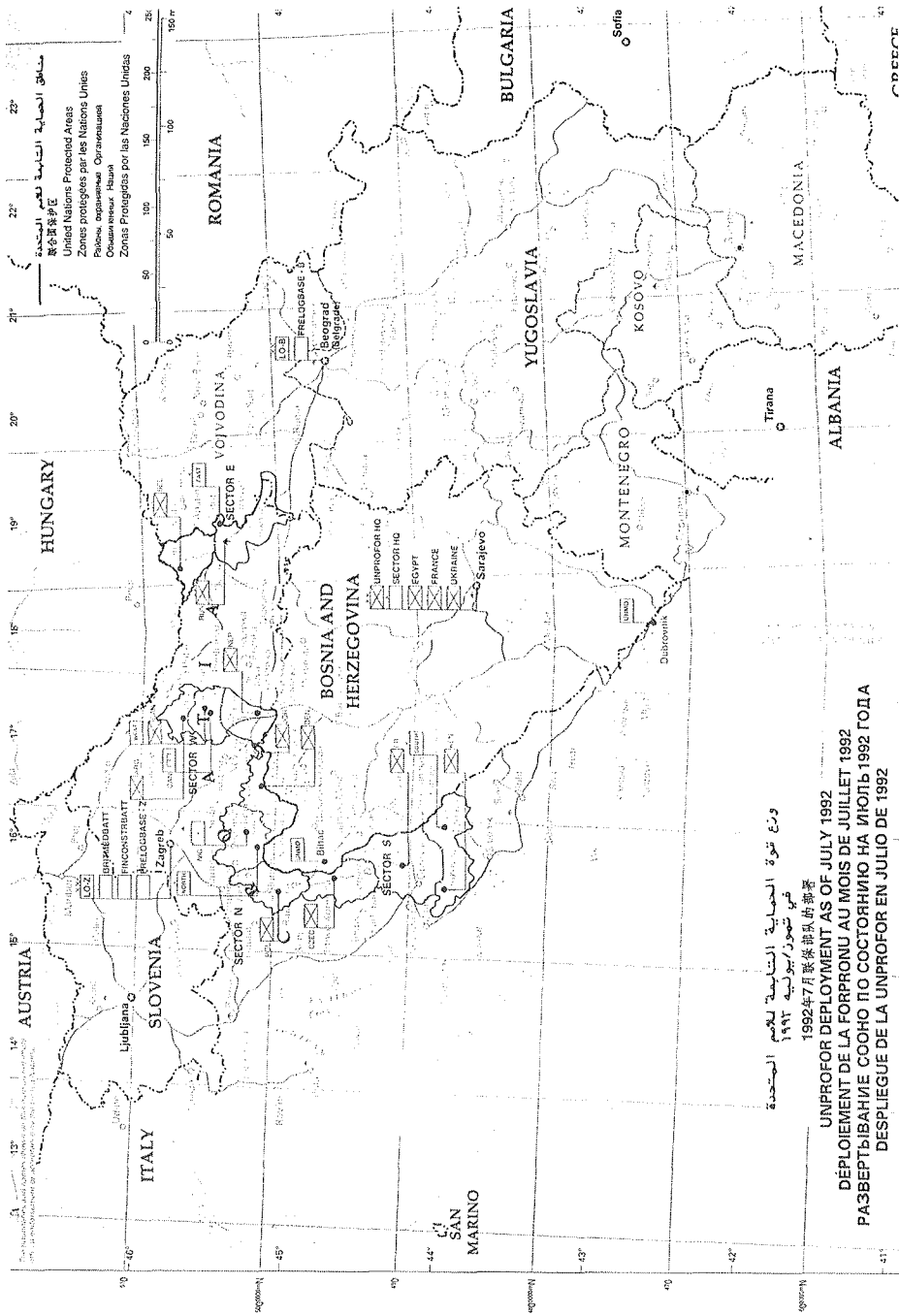
No, he said. How could I see them and not be dead? But one journalist told me he saw these camps, and the HOS commander said to him: Journalists are like soldiers. The less they know, the longer they'll live.³

In Zagreb there were no concentration camps that I could see. There were only men in uniform. Greenish summer leaf-light pressed coolly against the hot back windows of the flat's blocky rooms. Blocky rugs and furniture allied themselves with the huge rectangle of the TV which square religious pictures watched. My shirt glued itself to my back. On the TV the newscaster said *dobar dan*, good day, and then they showed the shattered flowerpots and broken glass of Slavonski Brod. They showed Sarajevo, a man running in the heat, a bird flying, smoke coming up, wounded people, a smashed roof. There came happy trilling music. Army boys and girls were singing at attention, machine guns at the ready.

Is this the song of all Croatia or just the army? I asked my friend Adnan. He was a Croatian of Albanian extraction.

Some not important song. It says we are saving our home.⁴

At midnight the bleached sidewalks and windowed wall-blocks formed a room of hot and tireless hardness, a single roofless night-room of many wide corridors which were usually empty but down which cars sometimes moved, or a man on a bicycle with lights. A dreamy fellow with a beard and glasses stood with his hand on his arm looking for a long time into the window of a shop that sold women's dresses. Then he turned half away. He tried to walk on but could not. For a long time he stayed locked into alignment with one dress. Finally he took the first step, but his head only turned further back. Two military policemen stood at the corner watching, one with his hands on his hips, the other turning to face this bearded one who stood still, peering into another night window displaying Cro Army chocolate bars in a camouflage wrapper (the accompanying poster proud of its soldiers and tank). Slowly the policeman came forward, staring at him. The man looked up and began to run.



وضع توضع الحماية التابعة للأمم المتحدة
 في صربيا/بوسنيا 1992
 UNPROFOR DEPLOYMENT AS OF JULY 1992
 DÉPLOIEMENT DE LA FORPRONU AU MOIS DE JUILLET 1992
 РАЗВЕРТЫВАНИЕ СООНО ПО СОСТОЯНИЮ НА ИЮЛЬ 1992 ГОДА
 DESPLIEGUE DE LA UNPROFOR EN JULIO DE 1992

U.N. situation map (1992)

On another night Adnan took me to meet a blonde in a dark dress who sat with her hands clasped and her legs crossed. I'll call her Nives. She said: Well, I'm Serbian and Croatian. I'm mixed. And I haven't any problems with my job, with my friends in the town. I can say I am Serbian. I think it is not so difficult in the big towns. Maybe in a small town I might have problems.

Two men who might have been HOS or maybe Tigers swaggered down the street in camouflage uniforms. One threw a cigarette butt down. There was a new slang word in Zagreb; instead of "cliquish" people said "squaddish."⁵ These frequent shimmerings of squaddishness were hardly so grave a sin. What if those men *were* HOS? HOS were only squaddish; that was all.

How do you feel about the attacks of Serbians and Croatians upon each other? I said.

Well, I am cautious, said Nives. It is war, so everything is much more intense. Many people say to me: I hate Serbians, but you are OK.

I had heard people using the word "Chetniks" in accents of horror and hate. A man in uniform had told me that Chetniks were Serbian extremists.⁶ So I said to Nives: Do you know any Chetniks?

She smiled. I'm not sure, because it's a name somebody from here they call people, but people in Serbia, they don't agree. My father is in Yug Army. For all Croatian people, he is a Chetnik. But he does not agree.

What would happen to you if you went to HOS and said to them: I am one-half Serbian?

They will say: So what? So what you want?

They would never hurt you?

Probably not.

They never hurt anybody?

I think not. Never in Zagreb.

We were sitting in a cafe. Couples walked whitely in the dark park-squares. I heard a noise like a hooting owl. Then from not far away a bell began to ring.

Some people tell me they commit atrocities on Serbs near Zagreb, I said.

Adnan interrupted, shouting: It's not true!

Well, maybe it's possible, Nives said.

Adnan grabbed his milk glass and stared at her. You don't write good! he said to me. Maybe it's true, but I have not experienced it and she has not experienced it.

The blue tram rounded the bend slowly, glowing yellowly inside. When it passed, a streetlight left its cool gleam on the track and then I could see the building block laced with darkness that used to be the artists' institute but was now HOS. A man in camouflage stood vigil in the doorway beneath a flag.

TITO

At midnight the Croatian flag waved endlessly on TV to the national anthem.

I'm sad about Yugoslavia, I said. Because I remember that when I was here before I could go anywhere, all over the country. There was no fighting. I would be sad if my country broke up into so many countries.

But your country has no history! said Adnan. Here we have always had separate countries. It was only the Serbs trying to dominate us who forced us into one country.⁷

I'd say it wasn't the Serbs; it was the Communists.

No! No! Tito was not well educated; he was not a real Communist, He only set up the Serbs to dominate the non-Serbs.

But, Adnan, wasn't Tito Croatian?

So they say. But I don't believe. They have his birthplace in Croatia. But I don't believe.

So you honestly think Tito was a Serb?

I think so, yes. There were never any Communists here.

But when I was here ten years ago, I stayed in the youth hostel with seven other boys. And they were all Communists—Stalinists!

He looked at me in disgust. —They were stupid! They were liars! I don't believe!

I speak from my experience, I said.

Then they were Serbs.⁸

GYPSIES

I met a man who'd seen gypsies at the dump. It had been early in the morning, he said, but the stench was already intolerable. The gypsies were roasting a pig in a pile of garbage. While the meat cooked, they were gleaning among the trash.

I met a man who owned a book of old gypsy songs. I leafed through the book.

What does this song mean? I said.

The gypsy is asking God to make love to him.

And this song?

He asks God to give him meat instead of sauerkraut.

And this song?

He asks God to give him a red dress for his girlfriend.

I met an old gypsy who tried to sell me shoelaces. —No, no, I said. I don't want them. I need a gypsy wife before I can wear those shoelaces!

Take them, shouted the old man. Only five hundred dinars! I have a beer belly, as you see. I must have a beer.

No.

Three hundred dinars.

I don't want them.

Two hundred.

No.

Okay, take them for nothing. They're yours.

As soon as I had the shoelaces in my hand, the old man laughed in triumph and cried: Now they're yours. Now you must pay.

I met a gypsy whore who sold me her body, her tiny body blooming with tattoos. Her bluish-dark face, her little elf-face, lived with her little gold Jesus. Her name was Dina. The first time a man told her to take her clothes off, he gave her five dinars on special green paper. She couldn't read or write, so she thought it was worth more.

How did you lose your teeth?

They fell out when I was pregnant. (Big eyes in the little elf face.)

Are you a gypsy?

I'm not a gypsy. Only my mother's a gypsy. My father is Croatian. My husband, I don't know about him. He's in prison for eleven years.

Why?

Somebody tried to kill him, but my husband killed him instead.

No, God had not given her any red dress, not to this tiny little gypsy in the green shirt with the gold ring and the name in the rectangular tattoo, the name in the flower tattoo. She had a mind like a bird.

How did you get tattooed?

My husband did it.

I don't believe it, said Adnan, who was interpreting.

I was hungry all my childhood, Dina said. I must sell my body because I haven't no food. Up until my sixth year I was going to school, but only two months at a time. Then my parents put me out on the street to beg. When I had something, I'd buy bread for my brother.

What's the war like for you?

I don't like Serbian people, but some of them are good. The war hurts my heart. I want to cry.

But I don't believe her, said Adnan. She says it with no emotion. She gnawed on her cross alertly, like a bird. —It's better you're alive than nothing, she said

That girl, what she says, maybe I don't believe, said Adnan. In her heart is darkness.

What kind of darkness?

I don't know. Darkness. She is very intelligent, very bad inside.

I met another gypsy who also sold me her body. She had dark eyes and a pouting face. She said: I'm not a gypsy. My mother was a gypsy.

Do you know Dina?

We're friends, but not such good friends. (She was drinking from a green liter bottle of mineral water with three red hearts.)

Has she ever taken customers from you?

I don't know. I never steal anything, but maybe she's different.

At the next table, some men from HOS were pointing at her, and making farting noises and whistling. She frowned slightly. —The HOS men said: Hey, whore! —She said: They're fools. I've seen them in Italy. This chance with you is special and I don't want to say anything. —The HOS men said: Hey, whore! Up your mother's cunt! —She ignored them all with her brown face; she shut them out with her brown eyes.

You want to see me naked? she said. Her eyes were darkly glowing.

How much? I said.

You want to touch me?

How much?

Fifteen thousand dinars. (A wink of her gold tooth.) You're a foreigner. Foreigners pay the best. Germans pay me sometimes a hundred deutschemarks, sometimes fifty.

Hey, whore! said the HOS men.

Sylvana raised both shoulders, drawing them in toward her head.

The HOS thugs were leaning on their hands now, smoking cigarettes, sneering at her with bleary eyes. —You're a stinking gypsy whore! they said.⁹

Fuck your mother! said Sylvana.

Summer darkness made the streetcars cooler now. Blue trains sped along the weird-angled streets, blinking their lights, and the people inside were not sweating anymore. What do you think of the Serbs?

Fuck all their mothers! They should go into their mother's cunts. If I saw a Serb, I'd bite his balls off. On the other hand, this war is good for business. When there's work, there's bread at home. I have children, but no husband, and I love bread.

How about Croatians?

Croatians are ordinary people. Gypsies have the Turkish religion. Gypsies are better than ordinary people.

She took me down a long, dark, stone hallway, then right at the first door, which was outlined in medieval light. She knocked. Inside was a huge kitchen of stone. An old lady and two burly old men stripped to the waist sat smoking cigarettes and playing cards. They were all gypsies. Other gypsies were standing. A man sat softly singing a song about a red dress.

Sylvana couldn't read, and neither could any of them. They didn't need to, they said. In Sarajevo I met a man named Nehro, and I never found out if he could read or not.

What makes a gypsy a gypsy? I asked him.

We come from India, he said. Our origins everybody knows.

Are some people ashamed of being gypsies?

I'm speaking for myself only, he said. I am not ashamed and I will never be ashamed. My father was a gypsy, my mother was a Muslim, and my wife is a Serbian.

I don't allow anyone to touch her. If she makes a wrong move with the other Serbs, I'll kill her myself.

Nehro was the commandant of the gypsies, from a camp called Mahala. At the beginning of the war, he saw fighting going on just above the Presidency building. He was there with his men and two guns they'd bought with their own money.

So you knew war would come?

We had a hunch, he said.

Are you a good fighter?

Not bad.

How about with a knife?

Have you ever seen a gypsy who didn't know how to fight with a knife?

What's the trick?

Be the fastest.

Why are you living in this apartment block? I asked.

When our houses were burned down, we heard there were empty shelters here. And this land was ours before the apartments were ever here. We came in and took over.

Nehro brought me into the smell of greasy garbage, where people with dark brown faces milled in the shade, never going outside where a sniper might get them. Kids in worn clothes ran from shadow to shadow, dark-eyed and skinny.

There was excrement on the floor. Past the open space under the stairs where eight people lived, we entered the shelter's arch. A baby was crying. Great shadows lived on the cracked wall, attacking the single candle. Deeper inside, women and children sat in darkness. —Sometimes an attack comes here, a grandmother said. We don't trust anybody. —She had a hand like leather. The floor was made of cardboard. The pipe overhead was from the toilet and it leaked.

Why is it so quiet today?

Maybe they're cleaning their weapons.

Do you ever sing songs here? I asked her. In Zagreb they sing the song about the red dress.

I'm too sick to sing songs. I'm too sad to sing songs.

I met a gypsy who said to me: I like our people because we are always very happy or very angry. We work only for ourselves, and not for anyone else.

What do you think of the Serbs? I said to him.

I'm a gypsy and I'm a Croatian, he said. Slit all the bastards' throats!

But I also met a man who wasn't a gypsy, and I told him I might go to Belgrade to interview the Serbs. —You're going to Belgrade? he said in disgust. That's a dirty gypsy town.

THE DETAILS KILLED EVERYBODY

Outside of Zagreb, there was a camp for Bosnian Muslims without documents. It was hot and dusty, and gravelly. People walked between white barracks.

Beside the hospital room, which smelled like vomit and had no windows and no electricity, and no doctor, an old man was leaning, staring. He had hairs in his nose.

The details killed everybody! he shouted.

He speaks without meaning, the interpreter said.

From here to this place everyone is going down, cried the old man. It's hard for me to talk; my throat hurts.

But it makes no sense, said the interpreter. Anyway, I see here ten nice girls. They haven't documents; with them one can do anything.

BECAUSE I AM A MUSLIM GIRL

A pubescent girl came and asked: Can I talk?

Sure.

She said: They started to shoot at the place where we were. Then we fled to another nearby town. We took grenades and everything.

What did you think the first time you saw a grenade?

I didn't think, she said. The Chetniks found me and put me in prison for twelve days. They came when we were making coffee and they said: You must make us coffee.

And then what?

They said: You must stay. Don't leave this place. Only a few will have enough food to go away.

And then?

Soldiers said: You must leave this village in half an hour. If not, we kill everyone here in half an hour. We were all afraid, and there were twenty-six of us in the cellar. They began shelling. Then we didn't have a house anymore, because of the shelling. The houses were all on fire and it was extremely frightening.

Why did the Chetniks want you to leave?

Because a second army was coming to kill everyone.

Why don't the Chetniks like you?

Because I am a Muslim girl.

Why don't they like Muslims?

Because they want all our territory.

What would you do with them if you could?

I would kill them, because they want to kill us, the girl said joyously.

What's it like here?

It's not the same as a concentration camp, but it's similar. If you go to eat, if you

go to the bathroom, you must wait in line. But you get something to eat. Nobody beats you.

TITO

An old lady in a whirling flower-leaf dress was stringing peppers. They were all women in that room, all Muslim women without any documents.

There are four generations here, the old lady said.

What are your memories of Yugoslavia?

It was nice the way it was before. I'd like to live in the house of peace again.

(Into my mind flashed a phrase from Lucan: *Rome's inability to bear herself.*)¹⁰

What did you think of Tito?

He was very, very good to us.

Did he always respect religion?

Yes, of course.

LIES

In Zagreb there was a man who sat in a bar. The town he'd escaped from, the town where he'd been born, was called Bosanka Gradiska.

He said: I was sitting in a cafe when a Serb came in. I am Muslim; it was a Muslim cafe, so I was causing no trouble. The Serb said to me, "I could kill you, but I won't. I'll kill that man instead." That man was the man next to me. The Serb fired two slugs into his head.

That was the story the man told me. That was one reason that he hated the Serbs. One of a thousand reasons.

What about the Serbs in Zagreb? I said. Do they hurt anybody here?

They may be hidden under another cloak, he said. Even if they haven't done anything against us, they have not stood up against the injustice.

I said: How can they stand up? What can they do?

The man looked at me and said: There is a mountain called Duboki Jarak. The Serbs took girls aged ten to thirteen from my town. They took them all to Duboki Jarak. They raped them all.

I left the bar and went back to where Tadjman was talking on TV, saying: Despite the attacks of the Serbian imperialists and their Yugo-communist allies...

My friend Adnan turned the channel to Serbian TV, shimmering, staticky. There was a red star and crescent moon on a purple screen. There were Cyrillic letters.

What are they saying? I asked.

Lies, Adnan said.¹¹

LIFE PUT ME HERE

Behind the barracks of the "Drop of Goodness" shelter, a boy sat drinking, pursing his greasy lips out into a snout. Women sat in old chairs reading and drinking amidst the hot summer smell of armpits. The old man was drinking, too. His breath stank of slivovitz. The boy with the greasy lips was his son.

I have to live in this place because life is hard, he said to me. Life put me here.

He had a goat's-leather face. His narrow greenish-brown eyes were shelved by pinkish underlids. His moustache, thicker than grass, was black and silver.

My son uses drugs, he said. But I never use drugs.

Then what are those abscesses on your arms?

I worked for five years in a small town near Rijeka doing metal etching. Those are acid burns. It was illegal labor, so they gave me no gloves.

I believed him. I'd seen people like him all over the world, people born without luck or money or talent, the kind of people who live and die most horribly. He was the proletariat. He was the one that the Party had set out to save.

Are you sad that Yugoslavia is dead? I asked him.

For me it's completely the same. I have sixteen years working. In Yugoslavia I had nothing. In Croatia I have nothing.

What's your opinion of the Serbs? I said.

The Serbian people are not so bad. I had many Serbian friends before, I believe they're still my friends. I remember the start of war in one town called Delnice. I took a few boys from here to fight, because we didn't want Delnice to be in Serbian hands. I had an old gun, and the boys had some sticks. The police stopped us and sent us back. They said they didn't need us. About the Serbs I don't really care. About the war I don't care. Nobody cares except the people who are getting rich.

The boy with the greasy lips heard this, looked at his father, and spat on the dirt.

My son of course really wanted a weapon so much, said the old man, scratching industriously at his sores. He bought a machine gun from the gypsies for fifteen hundred deutschemarks.¹² I don't know where he got the money. Maybe from selling heroin. Then he went to Bosnia and joined up. Since he was only sixteen, I was able to take the bus to get him out. I am his father. He must do as I say until he's eighteen. The judge made that a condition of his probation. Now he's angry, as you see. He won't speak to me anymore. As soon as he finishes school he'll be free to enlist, and I can't stop him. He'll go. He's a wild one. I expect he'll lose his life.

The old man was like a stone, an inert and sullen stone at the bottom of the creekbed called politics. Water and blood wash over the stone, but they cannot change it. Nor can it change the stones it lies against. The stone can do nothing. It is nothing.

Are people different in Zagreb since the war? I asked.

Yes, so much. Never before would they always ask: Where are you from? Who was your mother? Before the war, someone might help you. Now your best friend won't help you. Tomorrow maybe I'll help my best friend. But my best friend won't help me today.

But I knew by then that for the old man it had always been this way, that no best friend had ever helped him and none ever would.

EVERYTHING WAS WAITING

At the Restaran Splendid, it was not yet six, and men sat at a table in the middle of the preordained echoes, saying *Sarajevo* while a small boy ran back and forth, slapping new echoes down on the tiles which descended all the way to the toilet where the toilet queen and her daughter waited for someone to urinate or defecate and then pay them, and the radio kept talking with an anxious twist of voice like the tightness behind your eyes when you haven't slept.¹³ Then the radio played country music, and the mirror filmed with stale cigarette smoke. It's only fair to say that I don't think I would have known from these indications alone that what newscasters call a "tragedy" was going on, which only proves that I am stupid or else that tragedies do not affect anything except themselves, as we all know anyhow—so my point ought to be quite obvious, but novelists and journalists who write about foreboding circumstances do too often do what cinema directors do when they instruct the composer to make the musical score sound ominous so that you'll get it. My friend Francis said: But it doesn't *feel* right in Zagreb! but I wondered whether it would have felt right to him without the men in uniform. Maybe Zagreb didn't seem so different because the only other time I'd been there (back when Croatia was still Yugoslavia), people were also quiet since Tito had just died and they were nervous about a Soviet invasion.

At a corner where someone had scrawled in wide fierce strokes VUKOVAR, a lady in a blue hat stood waiting, I think, for the bus.

From the Gradska, music escaped past patrons at outdoor tables and impregnated each stone with the sky's luminosity. A little boy and a middle-aged man bicycled their separate ways over that light, which joined the ground to the sunset that the ice-cream man stood on. Three men in camouflage, U.N. insigniae on their shoulders, were peeping into a store that sold baby clothing. I heard a lady say to her friend: Vukovar and then Sarajevo, Sarajevo.¹⁴ —People's muffled calls took on a scuffed and polished quality in that cooling light. The bell sounded the half-hour. It was a small and dissonant bell. Nothing was loud in Zagreb. Everything was waiting.

SARAJEVO, REPUBLIC OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

CABBAGES

On the Muslim side of the first front there was a concrete building that used to be a youth hostel. It stood alone and apart from the apartment towers whose ragged windows and round shell-holes were a good three-minute sprint across a very dangerous open place that used to be a busy street. Curtains hung out of the hostel's broken windows. The roof of the portico was spattered with fragments of glass. The white walls were scorched. There was garbage on the grass, because in Sarajevo carrying the trash out was less necessary and no less dangerous than getting water. Some people in Sarajevo did empty their trash, of course. What would life be without the freedom to empty the trash whether or not it kills you? And perhaps it will not even kill you if that is your one indulgence, and your other rules of conduct are drafted more prudently. A man named Darko told me his particular rules:

When I walk, I am very careful in some crossroads. I never go in open places. You always have to find some kind of shelter, some wall or building behind your neck. And always run. Never walk easy. If you hear some kind of bomb or shooting, don't move. Try to walk in the shadows.

(This last bit of advice, I think, explains what I call "the Sarajevo pallor.")

The hostel was definitely one of the places to and from which you always ran (unless you were drunk on vodka), because it was only two hundred meters from the Chetniks (nobody called them Serbs anymore). To go by car you screeched across the sidewalk, weaving and dodging until you gained the safety of the portico. You jumped out as quickly as you could. As you ran into the lobby of the hostel you became lost in a wilderness of shattered chairs and planks. Behind a desk, soldiers from the Blue Thunderbolt special unit sat in the darkness, smoking cigarettes with their rifles ready beside them.

I remember the first time I went up the concrete stairs with half a dozen soldiers and crossed to the wing where no one lived anymore. The hall was black and it stank of burning because three days before a tank shell had come smashing and roaring in. The soldiers told me that when the napalm in a tank shell explodes, the snipers start shooting at that room to kill anyone who is still alive. Going down this hall terrified me because we had to run past every open sunny doorway, knowing that any Chetnik waiting and aiming at that doorway would be able to get me. Maybe a Chetnik was playing his binoculars across all the doorways and had just found me. He would be calculating my speed as I ran. He'd take aim at the doorway ahead, waiting for me to pass into its lethal openness and light (during this first visit I was too afraid and was running too quickly to see the smashed littered rooms and broken windows inside those zones of nakedness); and I also was aware that if the Chetniks were watching then they would know that I would be running back this

same way. If I were a Chetnik, the logical thing to do would be to wait for the prey to return. That was the worst, the knowing that every doorway would see me twice.

At one of the landings, a round porthole long since deglassed by war looked out at the Chetniks. The soldiers told me that there were about twenty of the enemy in that red-roofed white building which used to be an institute for the blind. To look out this porthole, you took a cracked mirror from the soldiers and sat to one side, holding the mirror at a forty-five degree angle to the still and shattered cityscape so that you could see the Chetniks and they could see your reflected face but they could not shoot you. When I tried this, a soldier looked down at my knees and I looked down and saw that they were trembling. The soldier smiled.

How do you feel now? he said.

Afraid.

The soldiers all laughed. —Try to spend twenty-four hours a day here, one said.

The desolate shining of the hostel's white walls in the twilight chilled me. It was a wrenched and twisted whiteness, so alone on the edge of life. Soldiers and students were sitting in the darkening lobby. A seventeen-year-old in a swivel chair held a Kalashnikov¹⁵ between his knees.

The commander came in. He took me through a room barricaded with chairs and then up to a place on the second floor where a man sat reloading his Kalashnikov in the dark. The Chetniks were firing an anti-aircraft gun right then,¹⁶ their shooting making the same idiotic rhythm for a time, then changing beat, then degenerating into randomness. —They are attacking from that house now, the commander said, showing me the place through a hole in the concrete not much larger than a coin. —That one, he said, that red-roofed one with the hole in the roof.

A soldier sat on guard on the steps, his face pale and calm, his lips gleaming.

To the right of that house there are eight bunkers, the commander said.

Through the loophole I saw a motionless kingdom, a grey zigzag of streets. White stars hung over green trees in the dusk. Then came the hiss and slamming boom of a shell.

On the left is a tank, said the commander. We cannot destroy it. In that tank there is a professional soldier from the ex-Yugo Army, maybe five or six hundred meters from our eyes. There they have their artillery. We cannot locate it. We have only *bad* artillery, the greater part of which is under control of UNPROFOR which cannot defend us.

They're only terrorists now, the commander said. They were Serbs. Now they're not Serbs. There are no more legitimate Serbs.

Another view through darkness. I saw the destroyed grey-white skulls of buildings, figurations of ghastly terror. Across that grassy courtyard heaped with garbage and rubble rose the weird vertebrae of a wigwag apartment building which had been

heavily shelled.

There was a student, Adbel, who was interpreting for me. I asked his opinion of the soldiers. —I like them very much, he said. Because they keep me alive.

He showed me a black hole in the ground where a student had been killed. —We haven't any chance, he said.

One of the apartment towers next to us had just been hit by a shell. Fire glowed more and more brightly in the window. Smoke soared softly into the night while sparks fell. I wondered if anyone in that flat could still be alive. Some soldiers and students stood beside me watching. We heard the sharp crashing barks of a machine-gun, and then an anti-aircraft gun started. The students were as still as the weeds behind the smashed red Volkswagen beside the yellow station wagon whose roof had been patched with a sheet of plastic, whose side was spattered as if with mud; actually the spatterings were bullet holes. Flashes of light from a Chetnik-held building pinkened the sky, glowing until they dominated the stars, sullenly booming. A howitzer made a tremendous crashing noise. The sky lit up in an arc around the explosion.

We have to hold this building, a soldier said. If this building falls, they'll get us. We all live in Sarajevo. They'll get us all.

The students slept in an A-bomb shelter in the basement.

The shelling is almost continuous, a student said. From April we've slept underground since our rooms are too dangerous. It's very cold. Food is a great problem for us.

On their cots they lay still, some smiling shyly at me in the light of the white walls. Their pale glowing hagridden faces were transected by blue-grey shadows.

In the ventilation room, they took turns for fifteen minutes every hour turning the crank. That was what changed the air. This job was very strenuous. Some were stronger than others. The strong ones cranked for half an hour. It was concrete-grey in there in the beam of my flashlight (they themselves turned the crank in the dark), and the sand was grey. —We have eyes in the dark, a student said.

On a dark hill nearby, a spot of flame glowed up. —That's a house, Abdel said. When they destroy our children, our women, our fathers, our grandmothers...

In the darkness, a shell exploded. A sheet of metal rattled.

The darker darkness of the camouflage-uniformed boys broke like the skin of a lake around a falling stone, because a man lit a cigarette. I saw a quick match-gleam on

the upraised barrel of a gun.

Of the eighty-odd students, there were three who did not sleep in the shelter. The shelter was too dark and crowded, they said. They had beds set up side by side on the second floor landing in front of the elevators. That was the safest place except for the shelter. Sami, skinny and brown, lay on one side of the candle. The two girls and I were on the other. The flame caught warring crab's claws and crescent moons on the edges of their hair and faces, the rest of their heads silhouetted against the wall. I told them about California and Sami talked about the Sudan and Suzy began to say something about Kuwait but then she began to think about her parents, who didn't know whether she was dead or alive, and grew silent. Mica never said anything. She was a Serbian girl from Višegrad.

After Suzy blew the candle out there came the first of the autumn storms, and wind groaned terrifyingly through the shattered corridors, chilling our faces, opening and slamming doors, toppling barricades with sickening crashes, knocking out jagged pieces of glass that smashed loudly on the floors. I could hear rain falling inside the ruined hall. The sky flickered white and black, then suddenly red from a distant shell. Mica moaned in her sleep. I had taken the bulletproof vest off because I could not bear to lie next to them with more protection than they had, but all that meant was that I kept waking up wondering when a shell or a bullet would discover me. This fear was, like most fears, founded on inexact statistical analysis. Had I known that in World War I, for instance, it required on average five thousand bullets to wound or kill a single soul,¹⁷ I might have slept better, although in Sarajevo they probably harmed people more efficiently since so many of them were noncombatants. At any rate, I did sleep better every night, because after all I was there and my fear could not do me any good, so it was better to be influenced by fallacies of safety than by chimeras of extinction. At six in the morning, a soldier woke us. Six was the time at which one must leave open places, because it was getting light and the snipers would be able to see in. The girls got up one by one, rolling up their sheets and carrying them away. I could see the white roll of cotton fading down the dark hall as Mica vanished. By six-thirty, dawn was well established, the sky grey like a dirty sheet, raindrops tinkling down against glass shards on the floor, and the Chetniks beginning to fire once again with the anti-aircraft gun.

In Sami's room the window was shattered, the wood splintered on the sill. Blue sky was cracked with greenish glass-lines and tracked and sectored by translucent tape. Sami told me that he'd been lying on his bed a week before, at about 5:00, when the bomb came in. He'd had a bad feeling just before it happened. Shrapnel had shot up over his head and gone into the corner of the ceiling. He was knocked to the floor. —Thanks for God I tell you because until now I live!—Now he took an ice-cold shower in the dark bathroom, brushed his teeth and smoked a cigarette.

Proudly, he showed me a fresh cabbage. That was the first vegetable I had seen in Sarajevo. I asked him where he had gotten it, and he smiled and said: Wait until tonight. At 8:00 I show you!

And what do we do right now?

We gonna make some tea. So nice for you!

He took me upstairs to the place where I'd had to run past doorways the day before. This time I was not quite so afraid, and was able to see inside the doorways. Bulletholes, shell holes, these the abandoned rooms wore for makeup, their faces splintered into a weird and ugly terraces. We entered a door. Whoever's room this had been had left quickly or been killed. All over the floor lay rumpled clothing, shoes, photos, identity cards, even coins. Curtains blew back from the shattered windows. —You want sweater? said Sami. It will be very good for you. Always the girls go shopping here.

We entered another door. The room had many holes in the wall. —Sniper, said Sami. If you stand there you will die. —From a ruined dresser he took some scraps of wood as quickly as he could. Then we ran back downstairs. We walked quickly when we got to the open part where snipers might see us, and we came to a landing where the concrete wall was scorched black. From his kindling and some sheets of old physics exercises Sami started a fire almost at once. He put on the black cast iron pot. The dresser-wood crackled and flared. The landing filled with smoke. A soldier peered out at the Chetniks, yawning and gripping his Kalashnikov. He rubbed smoke out of his eyes. He squatted on the stairs, leaning on the butt of the gun. —If he see, he must shoot, said Sami. If no see sniper, he must not shoot. Because they always shoot back again. We must shoot only for control, to make them afraid.

The water was boiling now. The Chetniks were shooting from their house behind the parking garage. We had tea.

At a little before four-o'-clock, the shooting and shelling around the building had become intense. All the civilians except Suzy, Mica, Sami and me had gone down to the shelter. Sami said: From the first day of the war, I have never left my room. I will never leave my room.

Then the soldiers had to get their one rifle and go down and fight. The two women sat on the terrace drinking coffee. I brought Mica a vodka and she laughed and cried: Oh, no! and Suzy said: She don't like. So I left the shotglass on the table in front of her and went back to Sami's room to get my binoculars. I was going with the soldiers.

I could hear Mica laughing with Suzy on the terrace in between bursts of bullets because everything else was so quiet. Then I heard her walking past me down the hall. I heard her unlock her door. Then I heard firecrackers in the empty sky.

In the dark, people were going down to the shelter to get water. Sami was still

asleep. Women kept calling Mica, and Mica would reply: *Molim?* Suzy came back with water. Mica was calling her. Then the noises stopped and I heard a dog bark, which sounded very strange. A thunderous purr of distant howitzer silenced that, but Mica and Suzy went on speaking to one another in the hall. A soldier came for me. He had a bottle of slivovitz in his hand.

To shoot Chetniks you go up a few flights of stairs and walk quickly down the hall heaped with plaster, old clothes, trash, scorched wood and broken glass, flitting as quickly as you can past the sunny doorways where students used to live and into which the Chetniks can see from their white house next to the destroyed newspaper building, and then you cross a corner terrace and run because it is very exposed and you go up a cement-walled flight or two or stairs until you reach the porthole of your choice, where there will be a couple of chairs and many many 7.62 and 30.06 shells golden and black on the floor. You turn the chair backwards and straddle it, leaning against the back of it as you fit the rifle against your shoulder and line up your sights on one of the windows of the red-roofed white house and then you wait for movement. The soldier who's pointed out the apartment house where he used to live with his mother and sister and where a Chetnik shell struck when his mother and sister happened to be there (they lived) takes aim. He fires five careful shots. He says: I prefer to wait, you know, I can stay like this two days. I wait. I prefer to see someone dying.

You each fire. The Chetniks do nothing. You fire again. The Chetniks send machine gun bullets against the walls. You wait until they stop and they fire again. The soldier who pointed out the apartment house where he used to live says: All Chetniks have beards.¹⁸ They never wash. When I come home, I wash. They, never. They stink. They are dirty.

They killed three of our men here, a soldier said, two from snipers and one from a shell.

At night Sami and the commander and two other soldiers played cards by the light of one candle kept low on the floor, and their breath clouded. They laughed. The besiegers played their usual music. After it was time to sleep we hid our faces under the blankets for warmth. Just after I got to sleep the enemy sent a shell. Their machine guns probed the walls of the hostel briefly from time to time, each bullet hoping to find not concrete but a window and then flesh. There was also a noise like some huge thing splashing. Then, once, a shell came very close and loud.

The morning was clear and cold, with shots, drumlike machine guns now extremely loud and nasty. Mica had taken a cold shower and washed her hair which was as black

as the soot-galaxies that powdered the corner of Sami's white ceiling where the shell had exploded. In the cold shadows of distant buildings, people ran, carrying splinters of wood as something smashed fiercely and repeatedly. Mica carried the teapot back to her room, filled it from the bathroom, and the war continued to happen as the girls laughed and smiled. They played ping-pong and Tzeta was presented with a white rose from the old gardener outside and everyone teased Tzeta's boyfriend.

Suzy, Sami and Mica talked about escaping again, but no one could come up with a plan, so Suzy sighed and fell silent. I will always remember those dreary evenings of darkness, the candle on the floor or even extinguished, depending on our fear, and the darknesses of those motionless faces like coagulated misery. Of the three of them I worried the most about Mica. Sami was an organizer. Whatever was possible he would do. Suzy for all her depression seemed extroverted. She had friends. Mica, however, was shy and quiet. Even now she continued to study her subject, which was forestry. She seemed so often to be terrified and silent. And she was a Serb.

I called UNPROFOR to ask about the students. A woman told me: I wouldn't worry about them if I were you. They're foreigners. Nobody wants to feed them in the winter. In a few days we'll evacuate them.

Because they're foreigners?

That's right.

Then what about the Serbian students? I understand that there are seven.

This is only my opinion, but I don't think they'll be evacuated.

At that time the students did not seem to me to be sufficiently organized. It was very discouraging to me to see how passive they were. Their most important job ought to be preparing for winter. (The soldiers were better off. They had a twelve-hour shift and then they could go home.) Whenever I discussed the future with the students, they would say only: We will die. This seemed to me unnecessarily defeatist. If the siege was not lifted before winter, the chances were that some of them would in fact die, but without proper planning all of them would die.

First of all, I thought, they ought to be gathering fuel of any kind. Abdel and some others agreed with me that there remained at most two months' worth of furniture in the building to be burned. I had met several people in Sarajevo who were living in well furnished apartments formerly occupied by Serbs. That must mean that there were other empty apartments full of fuel. And what about the flats that had been hit by enemy shells? In some of them the owners must be dead and there must be splintered tables and desks which could heat enough water for many meals. The problem, of course, was making the trip to collect the wood. Just going as far as the other hostel building was frightening. —Get ready to run, Sami said

as we were about to clear the shelter of the portico. Then we were running past shattered glassed structures which I had only the briefest time to glimpse; maybe they were greenhouses. Later I saw that they had been cafeterias. Inside the other *studenski dom* it was dark and cold. A girl paced, shivering. A soldier stood sheltered in a closet, the door opened, his Kalashnikov at his side. The windows were boarded up on the side facing the snipers. The plank nearest me had twenty-four bullet holes.

Inside the darkened sandbag concrete UNPROFOR offices where the assholes said no to everything and outside, amidst the rolls of concertina wire, a U.N. soldier sat in his idling APC with U.N. flag at half-mast for the people in the plane that had been shot down last week by Serbs or Muslims, depending on whom you talked to; inside and outside I went with Sami, Suzy and Mica. There was a general who'd promised Sami that the students would be evacuated.

They promised us so many times before, said Suzy quietly.

As we ran back from UNPROFOR, a shell landed not far away. I jumped. Mica bit her lip. Suzy just looked down at the ground, her face more grim and terrified each day.

In the middle of the afternoon Mica and Hazim were playing the game called Mica with dark stones and pale corn kernels, trying to get threes and cut each other off and diminish each other like armies. There came a terrible noise of shooting from the apartment next door, and looking out we saw sparks and smoke boiling from the windows. Suzy, who was sitting beside Sami on the other bed, folded her hands across her breasts and let her head sink down into emptiness. And I thought how many thousands of people there were like her in Sarajevo on that rainy day. Consider the red streetcar full of passengers who knew that at any time the Chetniks might send them a shell, but they were so tired and hungry and their feet hurt, so they took the streetcar anyway. Consider the old ladies who visited their friends. After leaving their passports with the old lady in charge of each apartment building, they had to ascend ten or fifteen flights of pitch dark stairs, past people carrying their jugs of water wearily. At every landing, the shattered glass was boarded or card-boarded over. People squatted there and begged for cigarettes. The people they visited all lived the same life as Suzy. They could never sit out in the sun because if they did someone would shoot them. If they stayed in their rooms someone might or might not shoot them right through their curtain windows. Consider the people who stood in line outside the bakery that had no more bread. The Chetniks had killed a crowd of bread seekers already. Consider the three men who went to a restaurant to eat but found it closed. They tried a second restaurant, which was also

closed, and then a third, inside which it was sepia-dark and people sat at empty white-clothed tables. After a long time a waitress came. Because the men knew the owner, they were able to order a bowl of soup apiece and two plates of meat for the three of them. The other people watched them with hopeless greed. They ate quickly. The measures in their double vodkas seemed to grow grander each time. Cigarette-ends whirred like glowing bees in the muddy darkness, and lighters flashed almost in time to the distant shells. One of the men said to the other two: I told you, Serbs in general are not bad. It's not my fault seventy-five percent of the motherfuckers are assholes. —I remember asking a Serb in Krajina his opinion on who the assholes were, and he said: Maybe the Serbs first started shooting, maybe the Muslims, maybe the Croats. But it's possible that all this mess was organized by Muslims. They want their country, and they don't care about the price. —And I remember a Bosnian who said: The Croats are the worst. They made a secret deal with the Serbs to divide up our country. In five years there will be no more Bosnia. —The three men in the restaurant were trapped, and so were the local journalists who came out of the office of the Bosnian Dragons and had to duck between two trucks to wait for their colleague because the street was very open and went all the way to the hill where the Chetniks were well established in those red-roofed white houses, so two of the journalists stepped out into the street to make obscene gestures at the enemy as if they were small boys, and then before the shell came they rushed back between the covered army truck with the Dragons' insignia on it and the Mercedes-Benz van which carried a couple of bullet holes, where they lurked against the concrete wall of the Bosnian Dragons' office whose windows, comprised of green glass blocks, were occasionally bulletted or shrapneled, the holes white-frosted with white cracks weaving into the green. Equally trapped were the patients in the French Hospital, which had been so heavily shelled that half the windows were raggedly black; equally trapped was the teenager who'd drawn a skull and crossbones on the side of this apartment building and written WELCOME TO HELL; equally trapped was the soldier now walking past Suzy, another huge-headed crewcut Muslim fighter who wore a patterned handkerchief over his skull. His black vest bulged with pockets for pistol and rifle magazines (empty now; he wouldn't go back into action until the afternoon). He wore a ring in his left ear to signify that he had a girlfriend. (In the right ear meant no girlfriend; in both ears meant married.)—I have only twenty years, and I don't want to die, he said. I hate this gun. I want to be drinking and fucking. My girlfriend is a Serbian in Belgrade. I have not seen her for half a year. But I must fight. For my mother and for my sister.

At seven o'clock it was getting cold. The apartments, tall towers of staggered length, their remaining windows shining gold in the twilight, were heavy like panic. In the dark landing, Suzy and Mica were fanning the smoke away laughing, jumping a lit-

tle, Suzy biting her lip when the noises came too close, Mica hunched over the fire, her hair dark and striped. The smoke was getting worse. Sami fanned himself with cardboard, coughing and laughing. He wore a scarf over his head. I looked out to the right at the still apartments and the hills behind them. The sky echoed with cannonades. Something jackhammered. Something unyielding and echoing went off as steadily as target practice; and there was a rocket, and then Suzy and Mica brought the little plate of halvah (greenish, soft, floury, sweet) and set it before us. I saw people running. Then the sky was empty again except for an unknowing cloud.

Tonight at eight or nine o'clock we will go out to the garden, Sami said. When we go out to the garden, we will make a great salad. It will be dark. For our organism, you know. To stay healthy.

It was eight, cold and dark, and we went down to the lobby where the soldiers smoked cigarettes among the shattered chairs (the words TO BIH¹⁹ made up of sanitary pads pasted into letters on the wall). Sami sprinted low to the dark ground, crunching broken glass under the balls of his feet until he could fade into the night-darkness of dirt, crouching, embracing the dirt, clutching and gripping for cabbages. He could not find them. A shell exploded far away, fixing us in light for a forever second of terror like some slice of tissue stained in Eosin on the microscope slide of God, and then we heard an anti-aircraft gun and Sami was running to another place and coughing. —I smoke cigarettes too much, you know, he said. —I heard him digging again. —Ah, now I find the last two cabbages, he whispered gleefully. We gonna have too nice a salad, you know!

When we came back inside, he talked happily and quickly, wet with fear-sweat.

I tell you, we gonna make a nice food, a nice salad, he kept saying. Too nice, you know!

Mica stood with her wrist curved against her hip, looking down at Sami, smiling patiently, saying: I know, I know, I know.

Sami, that skinny brown boy, agile, happy and kind, scooped tinned meat into a bowl of soaking rice, added some tomato paste and vinegar while Suzy sat and mixed everything up slowly and carefully with the fork and outside the action was starting, so the howitzers and machine guns boomed sullenly and Sami lit another cigarette, Mica sitting next to me on the bed, cutting cabbage slowly and carefully with a big knife.

Sami was always cleaning, tidying, keeping the room in order. He liked to be correct, he said.

Mica's thin and sprightly movements were like a little cricket's, her black hair tied behind her head in a short ponytail.

Now I make everything to be clean, Sami said, sweeping the floor again. And I gonna make some nice food. I am so happy. But I'm so happy because I wait to do it nice.

When Mica had finished grating the cabbage, I put in my last tin of sardines, and

Suzy added oil, salt and pepper. Sami took out a packet of vitamin-added cheddar cheese spread from UNPROFOR, kneaded it, tore open the packet, and slowly extruded the cheese as Suzy mixed with the big spoon. We were all very happy. Afterwards we sat drinking Special Balkan Vodka, my treat (the man I'd paid had run through sniper fire to get it). Mica and Suzy had one glass apiece, to be polite. Sami and I got drunk. He laughed and said: Bill, what do you feel? I start to fly, I tell you!

The room smelled of cigarettes as always, cigarette-ends the only light, trembling and jerking with the gestures of the dark figures against the pale unseen background, white darkness outside the windows, the soldiers drinking wearily, the noises going on outside. A soldier said: You know, we used to drink with the Serbs. And now all Serbs are Chetniks. —A thud and a sullen thunder-roll echoed outside. I heard the high heels of the two girls coming down the stairs. I heard the sound of something crashing into echoing depths. A soldier rose, flickered into existence for a moment by grace of his cigarette lighter, then joined the darkness that snapped around him. A thud, an echo with many reverberations, and then a sharp echoing crack ached in our bones, but the soldiers began to sing. They told me: This is a song about a dead girl, very religious.

Then a soldier came in and ordered them to be quiet because the Chetniks might be doing something under cover of the happiness. Everyone sat in silence.

At midnight there were no lights in the city, nothing but grimy darkness made more hideous by a reddish-orange moon.

A bullet struck somewhere, and a window shattered.

I miss something, Sami said. I don't know what. I feel so bad I tell you.

All morning Mica carried pots up and down the dark stairs or sat on those stairs feeding the fire with splinters of wood and pages from an old computer book. (That burned and smoky smell of Sarajevo is not the smell of gunpowder but rather the smell of burning chair-legs and scorching paint where people are cooking.) At noon, it got quieter, the noises sounding almost happy like construction and from the terrace we saw two men walk slowly in the open street; it seemed almost shocking. Not long after, a man went the same way, sprinting with his head down. A moment later the machine guns resumed.

A soldier said that they had just thrown a bomb against the Chetniks, so the Chetniks could be expected to retaliate, and even at that moment we heard machine

gun bullets striking outside. After a long time they stopped. A man sewed and chopped wood outside. The ping-pong ball clicked between two paddles, and howitzer sounded. It was cold. For the second time the water was off. The soldiers in the hostel were shooting carefully, single shots spaced far apart that echoed coldly under the blue sky. A soldier fired five shots very close together, and a sixth.

There were loud smashing noises and later I found 30.06 shells all over the floor.

It was a quiet day because a VIP had arrived in a VIP plane, which was unfortunately too good to pack out the two new French bodies, and the inhabitants of Sarajevo sat in the shade in front of their partially destroyed flats (in the sun people were more visible, so they ran). I took one of my walks, which always began and ended with a run, and I came to a basking-place between apartments. A man whose jaw had been bandaged with packing tape stared up the hill at the red roofed white houses. The boy whose girlfriend had no legs anymore sat next to the boy with a white bandage over his eye, and the man with his arm in a sling laughed as his militia friend shot him with an unloaded pistol. The militia friend loved that pistol. He kept pointing at everyone and firing it. The old janitress walked by leering at the boys and they shouted and imitated her gleefully. Then the shell came. It hit around twenty meters from us. I went briefly deaf in one ear. —Run, run, run! Everyone was shouting. We sprinted into the nearest apartment building. Standing in the dark and stinking lobby in that crowd, I saw that no one had been hurt this time. The man with the bandaged eye said that the shrapnel must have gone into the grass. I had a couple of splinters in the palm of my hand. The old lady who was in charge of passports for that building wrote down the time of the attack in a notebook. Then we stood together waiting for a few more minutes in case the Chetniks might send us some surprises. No more shells came. —Well, my friend, said the man with the bandaged eye, I must go upstairs now. My wife will be worried about me on account of that shell. —He winked. —And so will my girlfriend.

I had to make another useless phone call to UNPROFOR, so I walked back to the TV station, where reruns of "Hogan's Heroes" played hellishly and the canned laughter sometimes corresponded to the live shells and they started drinking slivovitz and whiskey at seven in the morning. When I got there, one of my colleagues was swearing. Forty-five minutes earlier a machine gun had shot four holes into the window around the corner from where I'd slept last week.

Maybe the non-Serbian students would be evacuated and maybe they wouldn't. Because I could not bear to think about Mica being left behind in the hostel to freeze to death, I went to UNPROFOR with Sami. A soldier and a British journalist had both told me that the best thing to do would be to bribe the guards at the

Serbian checkpoint to get her out. This would cost between three hundred and fifteen hundred deutschemarks. The problem was that this operation would deposit her in Kiseljiak, which was in Croatian territory and where there was food in the stores and a blonde girl told me: We have the nicest church in the world!—They told me that there was a good chance that Mica would be raped or killed there. So Kiseljiak did not seem such a good idea after all.

Past the first line of concertina wire and sandbags, a blue-helmeted soldier took my passport. I heard the smash of a shell not far away. It was a good day. The electricity would be coming back soon, they said.

A German journalist had told me to ask at a certain office about bribing the Serbs. The staff there had been very helpful, he said. I got a pass and went there. A soldier escorted me and opened the door for me. I had no hope.²⁰

The lady at the desk would have helped, I think, but her boss interrupted, frowned, scratched her nose, and said: I am not interested in this case. This case has nothing to do with me.

We're talking about someone's life, I said. I'm not trying to write a story. I just want to help this person out. You can't tell me whom to talk to?

I know nothing about such things, she said. We always follow the letter of the law here. You are proposing something illegal. I cannot advise you.

I'm not going away until you give me someone's name, I said.

She's a Serb, the woman said. You can try the Serbian attaché. I don't care.

I went to the Serbian attaché, who said that he would be happy to evacuate Mica if the Bosnian attaché would agree. I went to the Bosnian attaché, who shouted: Who told you that Serbs would not be evacuated? The evacuations are conducted without regard to ethnic origin. We help everyone equally! We are not like the Serbs. You must give me the name of the person who told you this information. I must have this name immediately.

I went back to the Serbian attaché's office with Sami, who was becoming increasingly tense. This time there was somebody different behind the desk, a man whose face was patient and whose voice was kind. He promised me that he would try to help Mica. He said to me: Why not bring her today?

When we got back to the hostel, everyone greeted me as usual. Sami seemed not to want me to talk with them. We called Mica, and I'll never forget the look of concentration with which she listened to us, because she knew that her life might or might not continue as a result of what we were telling her, and Sami warned her not to speak to anyone else, since it was clear we could help only her, not all seven Serbs. She nodded and agreed. Then Sami came rushing back. He closed the door.

Listen carefully, he said. I hope I can explain very carefully. If you are not very careful I will punch you like this! I am so worried, I feel very dangerous!

He told me that he didn't want to go to the Serbs again. Word might get around that he was a spy. Mica would go alone with me. But Mica had been afraid of me.

STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF SARAJEVO AND BOSNIA. WE WERE STUDING IN SARAJEVO AND WE SPENT HERE ALL THE TIME OF WAR. THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY EIGHTY OF US, AND WE ARE IN A RATHER DESPERATE POSITION. THERE IS LITTLE ~~FOOD~~ FOOD AND NO ELECTRICITY. WINTER IS COMING AND IT'S USUALLY VERY COLD HERE. WE HAVEN'T ANY MONEY AND TELEPHONE NET IS NOT WORKING. WE HAVEN'T ANY NEWS FROM OUR HOMES FOR MONTHS. WE ARE UNDER CONSTANT SHELLING AND MOST OF OUR TIME ARE SPENDING IN SHELTER IN DARKNESS, WETNESS, AND COLD. ALL THAT WE WANT IS TO LEAVE SARAJEVO AND GO TO OUR HOMES. PLEASE, HELP US TO LEAVE BEFORE WINTER, OR AT LEAST, SEND US FOOD.

- 1/ Sami Hassan
- 2/ Tričunović Sročan
- 3/ Slavica Jević
4. Džica Džonić
- 5/ Čović Nedim
- 6/ Dedović Emir
- 7/ Balić Besim
8. Vidaković Novica
9. Trnina Mirsad
10. Trnina Đorđica
11. Fikrić
12. Fikrić
13. Fikrić

Petition of the inmates of the Studenski Dom (1992). First few lines say: Dear Friends, We are students from different parts of Sarajevo and we spent here all the time of war. The complete list of signatures appears in Annex E.

She'd spoken with Mustafa, who Sami said had once been a private detective. Sami believed that Mustafa was a spy now. He wanted to call the whole thing off. He wanted me to leave the hostel immediately. He wanted to change his own lodging.

I'd had it. I agreed to go. I started walking out. Sami went out, then came back very agitated. —No, no, it is all right now! All correct! She has agreed to go alone with you.

Never mind, I said. I'm not going.

Please, please! If you go like this, I'll cry!

It was hard for me not to look on Mica without revulsion. She did not and never would trust me. I could not really blame her, but I, too, was very tense. Two days after my arrival on the UNPROFOR flight, an UNPROFOR plane had been shot down—whether by Muslims or Serbs was never established (UNPROFOR said by Muslims), and the airport had closed. I had come to Sarajevo for three days, with ten extra days' worth of food which I had given away at once, and now my food was long gone and there was no knowing when I would be able to leave. Every time I ran across the empty street to UNPROFOR I expected to meet my bullet. And Mica did not care. I was childishly hurt. So we ran to UNPROFOR in silence, looking away from each other. Sami ran beside us, and I did not look at him, either. We all three of us behaved very badly that day.

The Serbian attaché was still in his office. He spoke with Mica calmly, gently. She began to get very agitated. He spread his hands.

He says, he can take her out on a convoy anytime, Sami told me. She must only contact him when she is ready.

So she is happy? I said to him.

Yes. Mica sat staring at the wall.

Do you believe him?

I don't know, said Sami, and I saw that he was very tense.

If you and Suzy are evacuated, will Mica be all right?

I prefer not to be here, you know.

When I finally did leave Sarajevo in a BBC armored car, trying not to think about the weird injustice of life, that I could go where I pleased and they could not, I felt an awful sinking of my soul, and I wondered how many of the students and the soldiers would be alive at the end of the winter.

SERBIAN REPUBLIC OF KRAJINA

WHERE ARE ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS?

On the Croatian side, emboldened by the pornographic magazine in the cellar where the soldiers had tried unsuccessfully to shoot a hole through my bulletproof vest (I wasn't wearing it at the time), I asked what Serbian girls were like.

They stink, a soldier explained. They look ugly, and none of them ever washes. That's because they have no water over there. But they have plenty of vodka; you can use it as a disinfectant!

That was at the third and final Croatian checkpoint, just out of Karlovac, which half a millennium earlier had been the command center of the Austrian-financed chain of fortified towns called *Vojna Krajina*. Most of the soldiers of the old Krajina had been Serbs fighting Turks. The new Krajina was on the other side of the line, still Serbian, but its main enemy was Croats now, for it had carved itself out of Croatia.²¹ My translator and I drove down the road past the stop sign with bullets in it, the mines, the caltrops, the red and white pole as if for a railroad crossing, the house with the almost-square hole in the wall, tall grass, hot still air. Around us loomed houses under a cloudy sky with sky-chinks glowing through their roofs, houses speckled with shell holes and bullet holes, green walls pocked and holed, houses pimped by nothingness, clouds oozing through the roof-tiles that were missing in godlike patterns; roof-frames and skeletons, a roof without a wall. Past the mines and the next stop sign there was a rusty fence in front of a house. This was the U.N. checkpoint. It was very quiet.

Where are all the pretty girls? I asked the U.N. soldier.

In the cemetery, he laughed. Just bring your own shovel. You can do whatever you want to them there.

At the next checkpoint the men wore the same uniforms as the Croats, but their insigniae were different. We had crossed the border.

I sat in a plump armchair at the side of the road, drinking Sarajevo water while the militiamen from the Serbian Republic of Krajina ate inside a house that was not too demolished. A militiaman sat next to me. He said: Everything they say about Serbs conquering is a lie. We are only defending ourselves. We accept the Croatian government. I worked in a firm in Karlovac and I got kicked out because I was a Serb. There are Croats living on this side, but we don't touch them. We get along with everyone. We don't attack Croats. We don't attack children. We feed them.

We drove past destroyed houses and gradually came into another place: hills of ferns, brown cornfields, some houses untouched, more and more of them, their shutters down. There were hedges, geese on the grass, hills, red-roofed white houses. Then we saw two cows in a yard, an old man sitting. We had left the war.

Across from the police station, a black flag flew from a house where lives had been lost. Then came the cafe with dark walls open to the light, an almost Bavarian-

looking place. Three Serbs, two in police uniform, one in a checked shirt, sat drinking. The waitress, seventeen and beautiful, would not marry me because I was too old.

Well, I said, can you find me a nice Serbian girl like you?

She liked that, I could tell. And I liked the way she laughed.

The police translator started talking about pretty Zagreb girls, but the waitress made a face and said that no Croatian girls could possibly be pretty. The Croatian people were all wicked. She could never go there. If she did the soldiers would kill her.

And how about this country? What's the best thing about this country?

It's a *good* country! she smiled, raising her arm. It is a very, very good country.

The police were watching her. Can you give me a souvenir of your country?

She reached inside the cash register and handed me something golden. —Maybe this bullet, she said.

RISING UP AND RISING DOWN

The case of Krajina was a microcosm for the case of Yugoslavia. Here was Croatia like a crescent; the Krajina Serbs had taken a bite out of it—or, if you like, kept all but the crescent. “Croatian authorities could not succeed with their ethnic cleansing only on those territories which subsequently became parts of the Republic of Serbian Krayina,” ran a Serbian pamphlet that year.²² The Croats said that Krajina's existence could never be tolerated; the Serbs said that they would never give up Krajina.²³

Two years ago, when they started to blockade roads in Knin, civilians began buying arms, the man began, sitting across from me in his kitchen dusk in Zagreb, the ashtray full of cigarette butts. He cut the air like bread with his huge, knifelike hands. —At first they had permission to buy arms, he went on. It was then still Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia passed a law forbidding this. Naturally, then, they started to smuggle. Of course there were so many Croats in Germany that they had many ways of importing them. So then the police started blockading roads in Krajina, in Knin. You know, Krajina is the path to the sea where the big ships are. Police are blockading roads in Krajina because there was an uprising in Knin and Krajina the summer before last. They purged the Croats from Krajina. They occupied that part of Croatia; they created the Serbian Republic of Krajina. At that time the Croats had no army. The Special Forces of the police in Zagreb went in to liberate. Then they started shooting, not too much. Then the Yugo Army²⁴ got in the act, followed by the Serbian and Croatian regular police forces. Now civilians wanted arms more than ever, so they started blockading the various barracks, especially the Yugo Army barracks. Twenty to fifty people at a time would go, neighbors together, and attack the barracks before the police ever got there. In most barracks the army just gave up, although not in all. When they did give up, the civilians would go in, take over,

sweep up arms, and walk out with two or three hundred grenades. They'd hand them out to whoever got there first. Boxes of pistols they'd take home. It wasn't organized at all. Eighty percent of the stuff looted went to the new [Croatian] army; twenty percent went to the civilians who proceeded to sell off big lots. By the end, people were just jumping over the fence, as in the town of Peštco. Now if you have money you can buy a hundred pistols! Of course, the police came in and confiscated many caches.

SOMEONE OF THE PEOPLE

Early in the morning we drove down the deserted foggy road. There were fields and houses with potted flowers on the terraces. We reached the Karlovac office of military police, the windows wisely taped and sandbagged. We got our permission to cross, and then we left Croatia and went back into Krajina.

Looking back at the sign for Karlovac, I saw that it was full of bullets.

The police chief in the Serbian town was a huge man in camouflage uniform with a deep voice. As he talked he sliced the air with his forearm.

Probably you know the story from the other side, he said. The misunderstanding between the Croats and Serbs is from the Second World War and before. We ourselves were fighting together with the English, fighting against Hitler. The Croats were slaves of Hitler. They were against our way of life. Many many Serbs were killed in the Second World War, many, many civilians. I can show you five places where Serbs were massacred, all within thirty kilometers.²⁵

Well, as you know, we beat the Germans. We tried to put history out of our minds. Tito believed in equality for all nations. So we continued to live with one another. That was until the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, won the democratic election, if you can say democratic.

Tudjman tried to clean Serbs from politics, from government, from law, school, hospitals, and police. Because we were Serbs we must be dismissed. My wife got dismissed from her job. My colleagues got dismissed. Nowhere else in the world would policemen with twenty-four years of experience be forcibly pensioned off!²⁶ Well, a new generation of police came in. They were literally criminals. I myself had arrested some of them before! That didn't matter; all that mattered was that they were Croats. Now I must work with these criminals. They threatened to kill me.

Here is the rule of the stronger, you see. The Croats have no respect for international law. They have killed Serbs just because they are Serbs. On 31 October 1991, the Croatian police came to a place near Karlovac. They were six people in camouflage uniforms with masks. They took three Serbs away with them in an unknown direction. Their names were Grujić Marko, born February 18th 1950, a father of two; Ivošević Milos, born in 1946, the father of two; he lived at Subeliosova 1; and Pajić Rade, born in 1956, the father of one child.²⁷ After one month we found them

in the fields of Pakrac. Their throats had all been cut. An inspector tried to investigate this. He was also a Serb. Now we have no more information about him.

Meanwhile the Croatian government established a new flag, the same as in the Second World War. Under this emblem, Serbs were killed.²⁸

So I came here together with my colleagues in the police force. We didn't have to be under the control of the Fascists.

After that the Croatian side went by force into a Serb village with the new police to put the emblem in our schools and everywhere. The Serbs are a proud people. We don't allow this. On this very territory forty thousand of us were killed. The graves are still fresh. We couldn't allow this again. So the people rose up and forbade the Croatian police to cross our territory. We police officers organized our citizens for fighting. We won't give the Croats permission to come here again.

What's your solution to the war?

Look. I can tell you my opinion. The end of the war can be. Our people don't want to live together with Croats. We want a border. We want to have relations with them as with any other country. The Croats have Karlovac and Zagreb and other cities on their side. We have only villages. We are satisfied with that. If we allow again what happened during the Second World War, we will be eliminated.

Personally, I think Europe recognized Croatia too early. The Europeans don't understand what kind of state Croatia wants to make—a Hitler state. It's dangerous for all the world, especially with a united Germany pulling the strings.

May I use your name in my article?

Personally I have no problem, but unfortunately I do not have the authority to allow this. Just say you have talked with someone of the people.

THE WAR NEVER CAME HERE (1994)

BEOGRAD, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The initial success of UNPROFOR in placing the heavy weapons of the Serb TDF¹ in storage depots under a "double-lock" system was reversed following the 22 January 1993 offensive by the Croatian Army in Sector South and the adjacent "pink zones." The inability of UNPROFOR to shield the local Serb population from such an attack resulted in the Serb TDF breaking into a number of storage areas and removing their weapons, including heavy weapons, ostensibly to protect themselves.

UNITED NATIONS, REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(16 MARCH 1994)²

"IT'S NOT A WAR"

Three or four days after NATO planes bombed Serbian positions around the Muslim enclave of Gorazde, my train passed out of Hungary and stopped at the Serbian border. The tall militiaman grinned angrily at my passport, stamped it,

TABLE OF ENEMIES

1. The name of the main leader of each ethnic group is underlined.
2. All factions not mentioned in this essay are omitted (for instance, rival Muslim militias.)
3. "Hate names" are derogatory appellations given by the other sides (e.g.; "Chetniks" are what some Muslims and Croats like to call Serbs.)

FACTION	LEADER	ARMY	HATE NAME
<i>SERBS (Capital: Beograd)</i>			
Serbian Socialist Party (SPS)	<u>Slobodan Milosevic</u>	Jugoslav People's Army (JNA) and the Army of Yugoslavia (VJ)	Chetniks
Serbian Radical Party (SRS)	Vojislav Seselj	Chetniks (irregulars) aka Seseljovci	Chetniks
[Irregular Serbian Militia]	Zeljko Raznjatovic aka Arkan	Arkanovci aka Tigers aka Chetniks (irreg.)	Chetniks
<i>CROATS (Capital: Zagreb)</i>			
Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)	<u>Franjo Tudjman</u>	Cro[atian] Army aka Hrvatska Vojska (HV)	Snakes aka Ustasha
Croatian Party of Rights (HSP)	Dobroslav Paraga [before split]	Croatian Defense Force aka Hrvatska Odbrambene Snage (HOS)	Ustasha
[Bosnian Croat]	[mainly under HV control but influenced by HOS]	Croatian Defense Council aka Hrvatsko Vijece Odbrane (HVO)	Ustasha
<i>MUSLIMS (Capital: Sarajevo)</i>			
Democratic Action Party (SDA) BiH	<u>Alija Izetbegovic</u>	Armija Bosnia i Hercegovina (ABiH)	Turks aka Mujahideen
Democratic Action Party (SDA) Sanzak <i>in Serbia</i>	Suleimann Ugljanin	?	Turks aka Mujahideen
[Irregular Muslim militia, BiH]	?	Green Bombs	Mujahideen
[Irregular Muslim militia, BiH]	?	Bosnian Dragons	Mujahideen

and made some quip to the man who was sharing my compartment.

What did he say? I asked.

He said, *An American! Bombard him!*

Oh.

You can't blame him, the Serb said, and I thought about it and agreed that I couldn't. (A soldier whom I later met in Beograd told me that one of the bombs had landed in a hospital tent. Even if it hadn't killed his friend he would have had a right to be angry. A bomb is a bomb.)

The man in my compartment had been with me since Budapest. I'd liked him for his pride and sarcasm and wildness. Friends of his friends played "Serbian roulette," sitting in a cafe sliding the pin in and out of a grenade. He'd said: We Serbs think with our hearts, not with our heads. He'd said: There's no difference between capitalism and communism. Under communism you must work all the time or they kill you; under capitalism you must work all the time for money which your wife spends all day on things you don't need. —As soon as we crossed the border his manner changed.³ He began to challenge me. He said that Serbian newspapers had convinced him that the entire war was an American plot. The European Economic Community had weakened our markets. We had to break up Europe. So we instigated everything.

We did? I said. How did we do that?

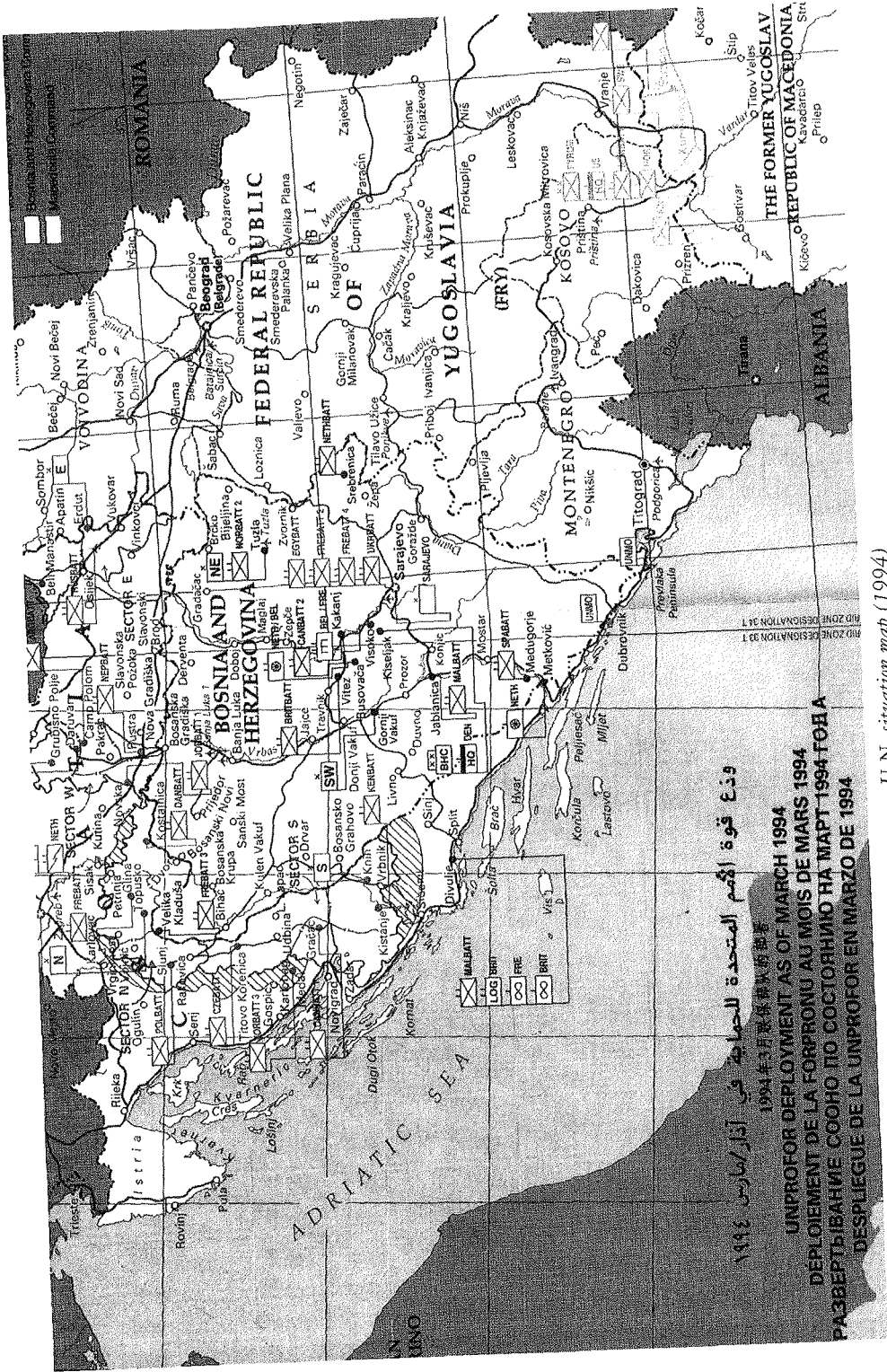
It's easy. In my town all you'd have to do would be to go to where some Serb lived and throw in a hand grenade, then shoot some Croats. A small group of professionally trained people could do it. Then you spread the news and arm the survivors.⁴

Well, I guess it's possible we'd do it, I said, but it's not very likely. Usually when my country does evil things we either help a dictator kill people or else we invade and kill people. I don't think we're subtle enough to start a civil war.

Oh, I think you are, he said.

With all respect, wouldn't we be better off starting a war between Germany and France? I didn't know Yugoslavia was such a threat to our market share.

This did not wholly convince him, but he politely turned the topic, and we sat watching as the train crawled southward through Serbia, accompanying a swamp whose grass-broken pools gleamed dully against the sky. He parted from me in Novi Sad, and I sat in the empty compartment feeling anxious and alone. Small black birds skipped twitchily by the dozens over a lake. The grass was rich. I had seen this part of the country only once, thirteen years before, in winter. There had been much snow then, and Beograd had been cold, crystalline and Communist. (I'd been reminded of 1926 Moscow as described in the diary of that outsider Walter Benjamin, who'd ridden the train there to meet his Snow Queen.) Now it was early spring. An old woman emerged from the wet, knee-high grass with her dog scampering behind, both of them gazing directly at me, so it seemed, until I'd been carried past them to a purgatory of submerged trees. Yellowish-green young leaves



وضع قوة الأمم المتحدة للحماية في آذار/مارس 1994
 1994年3月部署联合国维和部队
 UNPROFOR DEPLOYMENT AS OF MARCH 1994
 DEPLOIEMENT DE LA FORPROUD AU MOIS DE MARS 1994
 РАЗВЕРТывАНИЕ СООНО ПО СООСТОЯНИЮ НА МАРТ 1994 ГОДА
 DESPLIEGUE DE LA UNPROFOR EN MARS DE 1994

U.N. situation map (1994)

softened the horizon and soothed me. Tiny fields of reddish dirt set off the grass more beautifully. I loved this landscape. It was wild, lush, yet somehow dignified, somehow central European. Hills curved so green and softly; the war had never come here. —It's not even a war, the Serb had said. People are firing weapons and killing each other, but it's not a war.

What is it then?

It's not what the media says it is. You won't find Serbs who are preparing their knives and going to slaughter Croats, he insisted.⁵ Even the worst Serbs. But Croats are like that. One reason maybe why Croats are worse than Serbs is the religion. Because Croatians believe in the redemption of sin. So they can pay money, do whatever they want. They can kill people. But we are Orthodox. We cannot do that. We must keep our sins.

“AN EXCUSE IS AS GOOD AS GOLD”

May I speak then of sins? The first thing we like to know about somebody else's war is whom to blame. Then it “makes sense.” When the war is our own no thought is required; how can the enemy not be at fault? Hence my companion's remark that “Croats are like that.” As we'd slid across the plains of Vojvodina, which he said could feed all Europe, I showed him a suitcase bulging with pharmaceuticals that my friend Francis had given me to take to some Serbian friends, because medicines were hard to get now thanks to the UN embargo; and the Serb said: You know, those sanctions are what saved Milosevic. In Yugoslavia we have a proverb: *An excuse is as good as gold*. Now he can blame the sanctions. And the war profiteers can still buy their Mercedeses. You can see the ads every day. But the poor cannot buy medicine anymore.

I thought his aphorism very wise. Once we decide that “Croats are like that,” then we can make war on Croats. So which excuse do *you* want? Whom do you want to blame?

I'll give you your choice. Noel Malcolm's *Bosnia: A Short History* (1994) sees the Muslims as the victims and the Croats as more or less predatory opportunists, while *the pattern was set by young urban gangsters in expensive sunglasses from Serbia, members of the paramilitary forces raised by Arkan and others; and though the individuals who performed those acts may have gained some pathological pleasure from them, what they were doing was to carry out a rational strategy dictated by their political leaders—a method carefully calculated to drive out two ethnic populations and radicalize a third*.⁶ This is the view commonly promulgated in western Europe and the USA. But Greece and Russia would probably agree more with Van Loon's *Geography* (1937), in which I find a chapter about “Yugoslavia, Another Product of the Treaty of Versailles.” *Serbia (the old habit is too strong—hereafter when I write Serbia I mean the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) is essentially a Balkan state and its history is essentially that of a country subjected to five hundred years of Moslem slavery*.⁷ Then, of course, there's the third view;

I remember that when I was in a restaurant in Budapest I asked the waitress and the waiter what they thought about the war, and the waitress said: I feel sorry for the Croats. The others are animals. —Then the waiter expressed the fourth view, which has its adherents everywhere, although not everyone would put it quite as he did: The Germans have a saying: *You can take the nigger out of the jungle, but you can't take the jungle out of the nigger.* —So who are the niggers? I said. —They all are, he said. They need a strong man to hold them together. And we Hungarians can do nothing. We are afraid. We had a strong man in World War II, but we lost the war.

There is a fifth view, not especially popular, which I hold, and that is that it doesn't matter who is to blame.

AN AMERICAN CRIMINAL

The puddles on the asphalt glittered like mica as the wind-shaken birch leaves over them dripped bright rain. The lines of crosswalks glowed, perfect tiger-stripes, reflecting the crowds who traversed them. A slender blonde with her hair streamlined into a bun bent her knees and popped gum with satisfaction. The night seemed pure and clean. The rain was cold on my neck. A tall boy with a soldier haircut strode beside his girl. Umbrellas shadowed flesh, and clothing shone palely but crisply in that spring night. I felt like the man they would not see. Going into stores I found people staring at my pink cap from Las Vegas; as soon as I opened my mouth and began to mutilate the Serbo-Croatian language the stares fixed, the arms folded, and they stonily awaited my departure. Once as I went up the street I happened to look into a cafe; in the back were two men in blue uniforms, and I saw that their eyes were on me. They were not friendly eyes. A little later, two soldiers passed me on the street and laughed scornfully. Some of this, no doubt, I imagined; it was only my hat and my inability to speak the language properly that labeled me; and one of the first things I did in Beograd was to buy a Chetnik hat, which cut by half my giveaways; but even then I had unpleasant encounters, like the woman selling black market cigarettes who shouted: He came here to provoke us! Return to America and never come back! —Then there was the time I arrived on schedule for my interview at Studio B and a lady explained to me in good English that the only person who spoke English was sick so I must try again another day; that was the day that the headlines said *Boutros-Ghali Calls for New NATO Strikes on Bosnian Serbs*, and Milan Gvero, Bosnian Serb deputy commander, said in an interview with the fortnightly *Svet*: If NATO continues to strike Serb positions and civilian targets, we'll have to respond adequately, which can lead to a further escalation of the war in former BiH. We would in that case have to name the aggressor and the aggressor's troops in the Republic of Srpska would no longer be safe. Meanwhile at the Republic of Srpska office with its edifying posters (YOU'LL LISTEN TO THE SNAKE—EVE DID THE SAME with the Croatian-checked snake slithering toward the blue EEC

flag; and **READY FOR DEUTSCH-MOCRACY** with a pistol-equipped Nazi ripping back the EEC flag; and **THE BEAST IS OUT AGAIN** with a swastika and evil hands clinking goblets) a very nice middle-aged woman in a tweed suit gave a Greek journalist instant permission to go to Gorazde but not the Gospodin Amerikanetz even though my friend Vineta said: I had to exaggerate a little and tell her that you're like me, that you hate all those bastards. She's very limited. —The lady turned the rings on her fingers, swallowing, looking sad. She was very sorry for me. She said that if it was up to her she'd give me permission immediately. —Then there was the time I went by taxi with my first interpreter, Branka, to the police station (and the trees were deliciously in leaf and on a wall I saw written in Cyrillic **CHETNIK** and **HARDCORE** and **WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?**); and the meter said four dinars so I had to pay ten. —It is not right, said Branka. But you cannot say you will not pay. Many of these cab drivers have guns. —And then when we got to the police station we met the cop on duty in his bluish-grey uniform with yellow double chevrons and white Cyrillic on black patches and then the Chief of Police who had a thoughtful grey face and I asked Branka to please ask him what he did in the course of a day and she said: He's just one person, one part of the Ministry. —Yes, but what exactly is his job? —He's not allowed to tell you anything about the general situation. —Well, I said, trying to compose the most innocuous question I could think of, can he tell me why he decided to become a policeman? —He cannot do that. He cannot break the principles of the Ministry. —Which Ministry? —The Ministry of Traffic. I'm sorry, Branka added softly. You have to understand them. —And I did; we were bombing them, after all. (It was, after a while, a sense of being resented rather than hated that I had. The resentment could clearly become hatred at any time, and I felt that it was tending in that direction. For the time being they endured me, but they made me pay to be endured. Sometimes there were flashes of friendliness, but these often proved to be mistakes, like that of the woman who used the word "Serbo-Croatian" to refer to her own language, then blushed and said "Serbian.")⁸ So I took a taxicab alone back to the Hotel Serbia (not its real name) and the meter said eight dinars, which meant that I was required to pay twenty; and I sat in the hotel restaurant wondering what to do while the chief chef, whom I'll call Goran, white-haired and distinguished, sat down to have a vodka with me and sighed: Ah, Billy, Billy! and the next day Branka was sick and she thought she would be sick for a long time so I had better get another interpreter, which was how I met Vineta.

"I WANT A KALASHNIKOV"

Fiercely frightening, beautiful, racist, loyal, proud, honest and filled with hate, Vineta is my friend. She belongs to the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), which is perhaps the most extreme political group in Serbia. In April 1994 there were 39 SRS deputies in the Serbian Parliament, out of a total of 250. Vojislav Seselj, the head of

the SRS, proposed to her repeatedly, but she went her own way. He finally married someone else. Now she got occasional work as a translator (the press center pimp took twenty percent).

You see, we were just an ordinary Communist family, she said, puffing on her cigarette. So now I can send my brother and sister to the seaside for a week, buy them toys they never had, and still say fuck you to those Croatian bastards.

Look, she said one day. I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but I, too, was a volunteer in this war. A soldier. I joined and they said: Do you want to be a nurse? I said I don't want to work in any hospital, thank you very much. They said: So what do you want? I said I want a Kalashnikov.

Have you ever talked with your family about how it was with you?

My parents never ask me. In the case that their daughter is a killer they don't want to know. Fortunately I wasn't. If I was a killer of course I'd tell them.

We were sitting in the bar at the press office. I was drinking slivovitz and Vineta, who never touched alcohol, was smoking cigarettes, her sweatshirt almost the same color as her hair and half-finished Coke. She taught me the extremist toast: *Serbia do Tokyo!*—which means: *Serbia all the way to Tokyo!*—Really, it's kind of serious, believe it or not, she said earnestly, 'cause there'll be a union of Orthodox countries including Greece, Macedonia, Russia and all the rest. —I remembered reading a Reuters report in which Zhirinovskiy, the Russian extremist, had announced that he would soon be testing a new top-secret "Elipton" weapon in Bosnia; the test would kill eighteen Muslims.⁹ So I asked her what she thought of him. —I think he's a bit of a clown, but we all love him, she said, we all put our hopes in him. I think that Yeltsin will not exist as a politician after the end of June.

By the way, she said suddenly, are you a Jew?

No, I said.

I got nothing against Jews. On the contrary, I think they are educated and sophisticated.

That's nice.

Look. The only real friends of Serbs are the Greeks. And the Rumanians, a little bit. The Hungarians hate us. The Bulgarians were under the Russian thumb. The Russians, we can make an excuse for them. You're not among our friends, of course.

I know that, Vineta.

Don't get me wrong. I'm really against U.S. soldiers interfering in the Bosnia conflict. One of our generals said: As many soldiers as you send, that many coffins will be sent back. That's how it is when Serbs are pissed off.

I can believe that.

I can finally open my heart to somebody, she said. Before the First World War, there were more than ten million Serbs in Serbia. After the First World War, there were five million. *Five million* were killed.¹⁰ After the Second World War, another

million were killed.¹¹ Bertrand Russell was the first one who broke the conspiracy of silence when the Catholic church and Muslims formed the conspiracy. And poor little Serbian kids who became Catholics by force, being poisoned permanently against the Serbs, they washed their brains out. And the problem is that all the world is silent. But Winston Churchill at Yalta, in one movement of his pen sent one-third of mankind to the Communists...

One day she told me that she'd fought in Vukovar. When I later related this to my Croatian friends, there was a shocked and horrified silence, because to Croats what occurred in Vukovar was an atrocity. I have not been to Vukovar myself, but I saw Mostar (about which more later), and Mostar was hideous. A journalist who'd been to both places told me that Vukovar was far, far worse. —The Croats resisted fiercely, he said. So essentially the city was leveled, house by house, just like the Warsaw Ghetto. And Arkan's irregulars butchered hundreds of people. —That was how he put it, and that was how the Croats saw it. But what Vukovar meant to the Serbs I never learned, because they refused to talk about it, except for Vineta, whom I never asked, because I felt that she had trusted me to tell me as much as she had, and I had no right to disturb her tortured memories. Nor was there any need to know. The testimony of a Cro Army man I talked with in Mostar served just as well. He hadn't been to Vukovar at all; he'd been involved in an assault on a hill from which the Serbs had been firing on Dubrovnik. The Croats had tried to take that hill five times before. He was in the sixth wave. —That fight was chest to chest, he said. It was so horrible. It was ninety dead Serbs and so many dead from my brigade, so many...

WHO I REALLY WAS

Don't go out tonight, said Vineta. Just go to your hotel and wait.

It's that dangerous?

Okay, go out if you want, she laughed. But pay me first.

I was looking for a pair of nail clippers and had asked for them a number of times, trying German, broken Russian (which was similar to Serbo-Croatian), and English as a last resort. Everyone shrugged unhelpfully until one man in a shop in an underpass pointed me to another store. The lady there didn't have anything, so the first man reached into his pocket and gave me a pair. I began to believe that I had been imagining menace where none existed. It was a cold and foggy night. I walked down the dark curvy cobblestoned street, the rainy street which was lethargically, intermittently and silently crowded and which wound down from lights and towers, and then I came to a place that was not so well peopled. Wet corners of sidewalks gleamed. A little girl's dress was very white, her mother's black; and then they were both gone. As I sounded out a Cyrillic street sign I noticed a man following me, or so I thought, tall, strong and headcapped like a soldier, and another one

across the street who started to come toward me, and my hands began to sweat. Their faces—well, I blanked them out; I remember only the reflections of roofs and trucks on the sidewalk. I felt that they meant me harm. Fortunately I was almost at the hotel. The first man was one step behind me now and the second was close enough to seize my left arm if he'd wanted to; without looking at them I turned in toward the hotel's glass door, pushed it open and went in to the bright safety of the lobby (yes, the two men were standing outside). I went to the desk to get my key.

Ah, Billy, Billy, Billy, laughed Goran, waiting for me behind the desk when I came in.

I greeted him and took my key from the desk manager.

Billy. Billy Clinton. Billy Clinton, he sneered, and suddenly I understood that this stupid joke which he continually made was not a joke at all. That afternoon he had taken a pen and tried to write "CLINTON" on my lapel until I'd pushed his hand away, and even then I'd passed it off.

Billy Clinton, Billy Clinton, Billy Clinton, you will write bad things about us, he said in a jovially terrifying voice while the two desk men looked on, maybe understanding and maybe not since Goran and I always spoke in German, and I knew that my situation had reached a new stage.

Why do you say that? I said calmly.

You are American, Billy Clinton. You are all the same. You all write bad things about Serbs. You are no good.

I'm sorry you think that, I said.

Billy Clinton, Billy Clinton, he crooned, stepping forward.

You are not right, I said, turning my back on him and walking away.

I didn't know whether he—and they—would let me go, but I did know that the longer I stood there the more this man who last night had bought me vodka and sat at my table would brood upon my face and convince himself that I was evil. No doubt this was how ethnic cleansing worked, how ordinary people who knew each other slowly rejected, withdrew and demonized, slowly cauterized the arteries of friendship and then severed them with the saws of their hatred; and I was afraid. But they did let me go. I went upstairs and double-locked the door as usual. Then I wondered if they would come and do something to me. Probably not in the night, I decided. If NATO bombed Gorazde again then I would be in trouble; otherwise I could probably last another twenty-four hours before Goran and the others became more actively threatening; by then I hoped to be in Sandzak. Having reassured myself of this, I then heard loud booming voices in the hall, and my heart swelled with fear. I realized then how hard I was listening to everything. I could hear the tiny lift as it went up and down, the cars outside, the running toilet; I heard every footstep in the hall, and the exhalation of the radiator, and I knew that I could not much change whatever was destined to be. It was particularly sad to think that if Goran ever read this in some translation he would be convinced of my

evil because I wrote about his behavior which was based on his suspicion of my evil; the only way to placate him would be to pretend that it hadn't happened, and even that wouldn't work.

The next morning I knew that I had imagined or at least exaggerated things as I sat at the pale green-clothed table with my bread and ersatz tea while the bartender washed glasses. The bald waiter brought my bread not with hostility but with the semi-politeness of his species everywhere; and I convinced myself that no one had anything against me. And that afternoon Goran was standing with me in the doorway of the hotel when some business-suited arms shook hands with him right across my face, and Goran's eyes lit up and he whispered to me: *Bandito! Bandito grande!* and went inside to make money.

SARAJEVO IS BESIEGED BY MUSLIMS

Everybody in Beograd I asked believed that Sarajevo was not surrounded by Serbs, but by Muslims.¹² Branka, my first interpreter, had Muslim relatives in Sarajevo who had written her that a kilo of potatoes cost 30 deutschemarks, whereas on the Serbian side the price of oranges was just a little more than in Beograd. Somehow this proved to her that the Muslims were keeping their own people in. She said: Those Muslims people, they hate our government. Alija Izetbegovic wants to sacrifice his people just to show that Serbs are not good and he is a victim and everything else. Because U.N. convoys are passing through Pale, and none of these trucks could get through the Muslim side, only the Serbian side.

I know Sarajevo very well, said Biljana Plavsic, the Vice President of the Bosnian Serbs. I was born in Tuzla but from my third year I lived in Sarajevo. I can explain to you exactly all concerning this question. When we escaped from Sarajevo, at first our territory was just here in Trebovic and Pale. Our people closed the tunnel from Sarajevo. Approximately two times a week, the Muslims try to come up, and it's very easy for them, to kill those Serbian villages near Trebovic, so we have soldiers from those houses. Momila is a large hill which the Muslims constantly shoot from. Of course we must shoot back. Sometimes people are hit in the crossfire. Sometimes before some important meeting they shoot their own positions, to get sympathy. It is really wrong to accuse Serbs that they shoot Sarajevo. Only the Muslims shoot Sarajevo.¹³

"HE BELONGED TO A MUSLIM SS DIVISION"

Since I wasn't Greek or Russian or Serbian they weren't going to let me go to Gorazde; not even the German baron who mounted a flashing blue light on his car and came screaming through all the checkpoints in Serbia as if he were a Serbian cop could do that. The Serbs had decided opinions by now about the western media.

(Vineta put it: We're too emotional. That's why we many times overreact.) So I decided to visit Novi Pazar in Sanzak, which was a Muslim enclave very similar to Gorazde,¹⁴ the difference being that no fighting was occurring there, which suited me; I would rather learn about ethnic tensions by talking to the antagonists than by gazing at mutilated bodies.

I knew that militant Serbs believed that the Croats had a fascist streak and that the Muslims were following a fundamentalist agenda. The Muslims I met in Sarajevo in 1992 enjoyed drinking whiskey and getting laid; I didn't see any Qur'Ans or veils, and certainly never heard the word "jihad" even though the siege was at its height—in short, they were nothing like the people I'd met in Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia and Egypt. But it's true that in his younger days the Bosnian Muslim President, Alija Izetbegovic, was the author of a poem entitled "To the Jihad," which contains such lines as:

The earth throbs, the mountains quake, Our war cry resounds through the land,
Heads held high, men old and young, In a holy jihad our salvation lies!¹⁵

This was written shortly after World War II. In 1970 he wrote an "Islamic Declaration," which says: *There can be no peace nor coexistence between the "Islamic faith" and "non-Islamic" social and political institutions.*¹⁶ One commentator says that this is a "sentence frequently quoted in isolation by Serbian propagandists[,]. . .referring to countries which, unlike Bosnia, have Islamic societies."¹⁷ This may well be so. Given, however, that Izetbegovic was the founder of the leading Bosnian Muslim party (the Party of Democratic Action, or SDA), given that he'd told a journalist at the time: *For now, unfortunately, our parties must be sectional [by which I presume he means "constituted along ethnic lines]. The parties that try to represent everyone are small and weak,*¹⁸ it is easy to see how Serbs (and Croats) in Bosnia might have been afraid in those ominous and crucial years of 1990-92.¹⁹ Izetbegovic never seems to have renounced this conception of jihad.²⁰ The referendum of 1 March 1992 on Bosnian independence seems to have been ill-advised, to say the least. Bosnia certainly had the right to secede,²¹ but only if there was widespread agreement that that was the course to take. Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats were willing, for very different reasons; Bosnian Serbs weren't. The last U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia quotes Izetbegovic's "Muslim hard-liner" deputy as saying: "Of course we're going to move ahead on recognition. With Croatia and Slovenia now gone, we can't consign Bosnia to a truncated Yugoslavia controlled by Serbia." The Ambassador muses: *Izetbegovic was now playing a double game. With the European Community heading toward recognition, he thought he could get away with it under the guns of the Serbs. Perhaps he counted on Western military support, though nobody had promised him that. Whatever his motives, it was a disastrous political mistake. Serbia... now had the pretext it needed to strike—the claim that 1.3 million Serbs were being taken out of "Yugoslavia" against their will.*²² Misha Glenny, whose book *The Fall of Yugoslavia* can hardly be considered pro-Serbian, puts the case against the referendum still more strongly: *... whatever their tactics, the*

*Serbs insisted on the maintenance of Bosnia's central political mechanism of constitutional parity which is both just and reasonable... this system... had guaranteed peace, albeit an uneasy one... By ignoring this (in holding the referendum against the wishes of the Serbs), the Bosnian Serbs, who make up a third of the republic and who fought bitterly during the Second World War to be constitutionally attached to Serbia proper, were being denied their statehood.*²³ The fact that Izetbegovic was probably in an impossible position is beside the point. (As far back as the end of World War II, Tito's deputy Djilas had noted that being a dependent either of Serbia or of Croatia would be equally grim for Bosnia.)²⁴ I am not trying to assign blame or ignore atrocities subsequently committed, but only to describe why the Serbs might have felt the way they did.²⁵

Vesna Hadzivukovic at the Southeast Centre for Geopolitical Studies said this to me about the SDA: Egypt way, Algeria way, that's what they want. And they just have public relations to hide their true self. Yes, the Muslims are victims. But they are victims of Alija Izetbegovic.

Look, she went on. In Foca²⁶ in 1990, Izetbegovic started a promotion there and it was very scary. I was there. All those boys in those black uniforms. Almost one hundred thousand Muslims were there. And the stories they said! *Now it's time to end all our relations with the Serbs and kick them out.*

She showed me the front page of the newspaper *Nezavisime*, dated 28.9.90, with a photo she'd taken of a Serb in a chokehold; the Serb's head was down and he was half suffocating in that sea of helmets and hands. —First they started beating people, she said, then they used tear gas, and then water cannon. They beat this Serb very, very tough. He has a broken jaw and some ribs, and the doctor in the jail didn't put him in the X-ray, nothing. He just make a report that he is OK and send him to central prison. And after that the Serbs begin to think about their position in Foca...

Did you have Muslim friends before? I said.

Yes.

And do you now?

Yes. My stepfather is a Muslim.

And you know, said her colleague to me sarcastically, she didn't even cut his throat!

(Later Vineta, who'd lauded Vesna's bravery to me—they'd worked together for journalists under Muslim fire in Pale, which is near Sarajevo—said: I bet she'd sell us all out for that Muslim stepfather of hers.)

By 1994 the perception was that a number of Muslims were in fact Mujahideen—and not only Serbs believed this. There was a man in Split who fought for the right-wing Croatian militia called HOS;²⁷ he told me a story about atrocities committed by Muslims against Croats in Bosnia; I asked him who'd done it, the Bosnian Dragons or somebody else, and he said: The Green Bombs.

Are they loyal to Izetbegovic?

No one knows whom they're loyal to. They're an elite unit of Mujahideen.

They're Arab, and also some men of our race.

Another Croat told me he'd just heard a story about a division of Afghans who'd come to fight against HVO, the Bosnian Croat army. The Afghans had been in sandals, hungry and almost weaponless, the Croat said. (I thought of one HVO man in Medjugorje I'd met. He was immense and hairy-armed and hairy-chested; his daughter came up to his belt buckle. He was well clothed and well fed. He had a pistol and a machine-gun.) HVO cut the Afghans down by the score. Later they piled them into a truck and displayed the bodies. This story may or may not have been true. The point is that everybody believed it.²⁸

I'll always remember Vineta with the cigarette up above her head, pressing her forehead with her other hand as she grimly said: Islamic countries, we can handle 'em! According to papers from the Second World War, the Serbs are owners of 65 percent of the land in Bosnia.²⁹ Look at it. You have your house in California with a garden and I don't know what, and they say, move your ass out of it, we're going to kick you out for the Canadians. And of course the problem is the Islamic countries and the world conspiracy against the Serbs. It's some oil monkey business. Look. What's wrong with all our world politicians is it's only a small group of our people, not the ordinary people who ought to decide. Milosevic is guilty for this war because he wasn't smart. He sent many, many Serbian boys into direct death. Milosevic handles everything. Tudjman doesn't. He's stupid enough. The same with Izetbegovic. I think the main policy of his republic is an extension of Haris Silaidzic, the Foreign Minister, and Mohammad Sacirbay, the U.N. Ambassador. Those two snakes are really evil. Izetbegovic is just a stupid old man. By the way, he took part in the Second World War against the Serbs, on the Nazi side. He belonged to a Muslim SS division.³⁰ That's why the Bosnian Serbs reacted in a less than friendly way when he was made a president. The Muslims are a *minority* in Bosnia anyway!

The long and the short of it was that I knew Vineta and the Muslims of Novi Pazar would fall into each other's arms like old friends.

NOVI PAZAR

By the way, maybe now that you think you know Vineta, to whom Tito was "that Croatian bastard" (my friend Adnan in Zagreb had called him a Serb), you'll be surprised to learn that her best friend was half Croatian. At any rate, her friend's boyfriend was named Zhalko, and Zhalko was the driver. He had a tape of Serbian folk songs, and they threw their heads back and sang with exaggerated relish until they burst into laughter.

I asked what news from Gorazde and Vineta said: Nothing. The fucking Security Council is gonna impose more sanctions. Fucking Clinton isn't choosing his words. He keeps blaming the bloody Serbs, the bloody Serbs. —And I thought how bitterly humiliating it must be to live in a country which rightly or wrongly

was singled out for blame every day by most of the world.³¹ Surely this must encourage even more the Serbian conviction that the world was a predominantly Hobbesian place—already entrenched, so to speak, in people’s minds by the war; Vineta, for instance, once told me matter-of-factly how as a soldier she’d chosen to wear a hand grenade around her neck instead of a nice necklace so that the Croats couldn’t rape her. She’d heard from a Serb who’d been a POW how a Serbian girl had been captured by Croats and taken to a prison in Split to be repeatedly raped, until one day she got her period, which revolted them and made them decide to use another hole; when the first Croat shoved his dick into her mouth she bit it as hard as she could, so they had to shoot her. —It all goes to show, dear boy, said Vineta, what happens to a girl when she doesn’t use her hand grenade. —And she was so young and lovely with those long fingers, the nails growing out like spearheads, those long lashes and questioning brows.

I’m twenty-two, she sighed. I’m getting old.

What about me? I said to please her. I’m thirty-four. The last time I was in Thailand a bar girl told me: You no old. Old enough to be my father, not my grandfather!

Stupid bitch, said Vineta. Stupid bloody bitch.

The two were very happy, I think, to be going somewhere, Vineta in her gold-rimmed sunglasses, her hair tied back, droopy long-lashed eyelids. (Petrol had been 2.5 deutschemarks per liter last week, and in some places now it was three.) The songs had a sort of crystalline élan; they were polkas in a minor key, jazzy and fast-moving in opposition to the clouds of fat sheep at the roadside. We came into a region of fields and hills and greyish haystacks inside teepee-like frames made from saplings. There were whitewashed houses with the familiar orange roofs, and black-clad peasant women at the side of the road.

Serbia, I love you! she shouted. I love every single inch of this country!

Including that? laughed Zhalko, pointing to a garbage heap.

Including that. Oh, I faint every time I hear this song! I was just pissing every time I couldn’t do shits.

A man’s long trill stretched through the song; Vineta fluttered her fingers to help him.

Hey, c’mon, eat that fuckin’ chocolate I packed for you, she cried, turning round to glare at me affectionately. I’m not gonna leave it for the fuckin’ Turks in Sanzak.

I read those Muslim pamphlets you gave me about how they were slaughtered



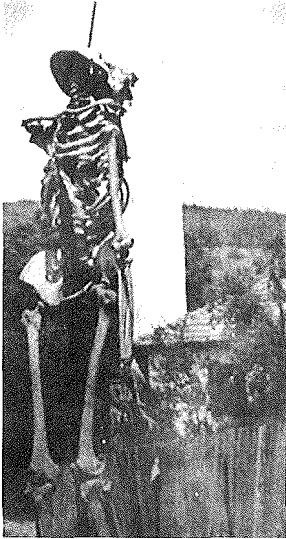
*Serbian photo of Muslim with a
Serb's head (1992)*

by the Ustasha and the Chetniks in World War II, I said. What's your opinion of that stuff?

Crap, said Vineta, lighting a cigarette.

So you think they made it all up?

Of course. It's their propaganda. They have so much money, you know. Anyway, in your country the whites are doing awful things to the niggers but we're not doing awful things to the Muslims. Just recently our police found a whole lot of Muslim weapons and they admitted their guilt! Enough to arm one or two corps. Even a mortar. They said they were just protecting their houses. I don't need a mortar to protect my house, thank you very much.



WWII photo in a Muslim booklet. Caption says: In Foca in Dec. 1941, the Chetniks first boiled the watchmaker Muftic in a cauldron, and then hanged him in front of the mosque.

We passed an empty gas station where a long line of peasants sat waiting on top of their tractors for black market petrol; and then we stopped at a spigot in the hillside where some soldiers gave us a drink from an old plastic bottle; Vineta had told me to keep my mouth shut so I just tried to look tall and said *bvala*³² in my deepest voice; and we got back in the car and Vineta shouted: Slobodan Milosevic can kiss my ass! *Serbia do Tokyo! Serbia do Washington!* Serbia all the way to the Milky Way! —Hazy hills, lush ravines, and Vineta was saying in her half-British, half-Slavic drawl: This song's a kind of embargo blues. I'll translate for you. It says we used to be happy. Now we can't fly, we can't go anywhere, we have no friends.

I'm your friend, Vineta.

I know that.

After awhile there came the smell of burning garbage. —We're coming into a Turkish area, she laughed. That's why it's stinky. Sanzak is not Turkish, by the way. It was the first Turkish country ever mentioned in history. Look! The old church! You see, either the Communists or the Muslims were responsible for ruining it.

And here was Sanzak (I had read in my Machiavelli not too long ago that the lord of the Turks had divided his kingdom into "sanzaks");³³ here came Novi Pazar, a hollow packed with steep red-roofed houses; a cloudy town ringed by hills; there were many Muslim women wearing shawls and mothers walking with little children; and a very dark beggar-woman caned herself limpingly by, a plastic bag around her arm, and two boys walked backward very quietly, staring at the ground. An old man and a young man with a dark moustache were sitting on a long low rectangle of concrete. —Those houses over there are very rich, said Vineta.

Serbian or Turkish?

Mainly Turkish. You see, they all have two-story houses.

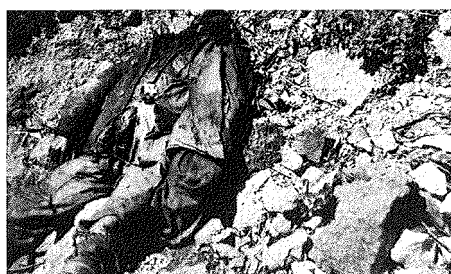
How do they get their money?

I don't know. From smuggling. Whooh! Smells like a dozen dirty Muslims that haven't seen water for ages. That's typical.³⁴ When you see a beautiful girl in this town, it's a Serbian girl.

And Vineta, who loved to inspect the female leg, taught me to say *cupi*, which means girl, and *riba*, which means fish and also girl, and *tucati*, which means to make love.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. HAZBO MEDOVIC, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL SERBIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (SPS)

The very kindly looking politician with the brown glasses and the nakedly bald forehead said: You are in a region called Sanzak, which is a part of Serbia, with a mixed group. The greatest party is SDA. The second greatest is this party, the ruling party of Serbia, the SPS. So here we have a place of real democracy because both parties are legal. The general situation is OK. You will hear that Muslims are endangered, also that Serbs are endangered, but that is not true. The economic situation is not OK due to our proximity to the battlefield. But my personal opinion, both as a representative of the Socialist Party and as an ordinary citizen, is that something like Gorazde is absolutely impossible to happen here. Gorazde is just across the border, and also has a mixed population. The ratio of the population here is almost the same as in Bosnia.



From a Muslim booklet about Serbian atrocities in WWII. Photos labeled: A victim of the Chetnik crime in Sanjak in Feb. 1943.

Are most Muslims and Serbs friends here? How do they get along?

Well, to be honest, the relations between Serbs and Muslims are a bit colder than they used to be, which is the result of the general situation. But in small communities there are still manifestations of solidarity. I myself am a Muslim.

(I saw Vineta frown in disgust.)

Under the Communist regime was the relationship better?

He used to take part in the government even during the Communist regime.

(He's an economist, by way, said Vineta, translating.) He says the relationship between the two groups was much better than today. The SDA didn't want to take part in the elections. As to why, you should ask the Muslims. They make up 70 percent of the population, but they are not adequately represented in Parliament because only those in the SPS are represented—and that's entirely their fault, Vineta added. This guy's a former Communist. He's all in favor of unity and all that crap.

When in your view is ethnic cleansing necessary?

He says that he's categorically against anything like ethnic cleansing, and so is his party and so is everybody here.

Any messages for Clinton?

Well, he's got a message for Clinton. Dialogues like this are very useful. President Clinton should not listen to any wrongful advice.

Any messages for Mr. Qadhafi? I hazarded.

He laughed. —He says he was in Libya before and he saw Mr. Qadhafi himself, replied Vineta, much to my amazement. It's no problem for Serbs that we are good friends—which is crap that he is saying.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. RASIM LJAJIC, PRIME MINISTER OF THE MUSLIM NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SANZAK AND GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE SDA

He was an olive-skinned man in a suit and tie, very Mediterranean-looking. His assistant offered us some lemonade before the interview, and while the two of them went to make it Vineta said: There's a big picture of Izetbegovic on the wall, so you see what are these tendencies. —She slammed her hand down on the table. —*Fuck* those Turks! He'll probably take a leak in my glass. He looks like a leak.

Well, there *is* kind of a tension you feel in the air, the man said in answer to my question. And that tension is the consequence of the Beograd regime's policy. The Muslims in Sanzak are being slowly and gradually ethnically cleansed. It started two years ago. Seventy thousand Muslims have left for western Europe, Scandinavian countries, Turkey and elsewhere.

We were just speaking with another Muslim down the hall who said that everything is OK here, I said. Why would he say the opposite?

Simply because Mr. Medovic for some unknown reason is implementing the Socialist Party's program, which doesn't even have the support of one one-thousandth of one percent of local Muslims. There are a small number of Muslims in the SPS, serving as a curtain so that the SPS can pretend to be multi-ethnic. Those Muslims are more privileged than others. Mr. Medovic is the manager of a local factory and can keep all the perks which go with that.

You can find physically maltreated people here, he insisted. The people feel physically endangered. And of course there were those two kidnappings, the seven-

teen passengers who disappeared on the bus from Priboj in February of last year, and then those twenty-five passengers on the train from Beograd to Bar, and so far we know nothing about them.

And they were all Muslim?

One was a Croat.

Next he showed me some hideous photographs.

The Serbs did this?

Yes, said Dr. Ljajic.

Would it be possible for me to meet and photograph any of the victims in these photos?

He can give you some duplicates, Vineta interpreted.

These people could be anyone, Serbs or Muslims or Croats. Could I meet them?

I think we'd better talk about it with the authorities before we accept anything, said Vineta smoothly.

I have become professionally skeptical when people show me pictures of tortured, dead, or mutilated people and then tell me who they are. An extreme image insists on its truth, but context is everything in such situations. Anybody can say that these victims are anybody.³⁵ So I said again: I'd like to meet the people in these photographs.

He says if you were stay longer he could organize it, but not now. These people are in villages far from here.

How far?

This one is about forty-five kilometers.

Oh, so long would that take? Half an hour? An hour?

Something like that, said Vineta. But first we must talk. In the first place there might be problems with the authorities.

I thought very carefully about what she was saying. I considered asking the man if there were anything I could do in Novi Pazar to verify his answers. I decided to say nothing. First of all, if there were such people, my meeting them would probably subject them to more harassment. Second of all, Vineta would not like it, and I very much wanted to understand her and be her friend. Thirdly, Dr. Ljajic was scarcely bending over backwards to bring me to these people, so it was clearly a lost cause.

In the district of Pljevlja, two mosques were pulled down, he went on, we think by a Serbian paramilitary formation, but the official Montenegrin statement was that birds made electrical contact with these buildings and burned them down. And what's going on in Bosnia is an attempt from Croatia and Serbia to make Great Croatia and Great Serbia.

Are you yourself physically harassed?

One part of the local SDA leadership in Montenegro had to leave the country in order to avoid arrest. Out of thirty leaders, only seven are now free.

Why are you still a free man?

I don't know. It's just a matter of time. I think it's a game of the authorities.

He showed me last year's photos of tanks pointing their gun-turrets down into the city. They reminded me eerily of Sarajevo.

Why were they withdrawn?

Because of international pressure.

Are you and I in physical danger as a result of this interview? I asked.

We're being constantly shadowed by political police, he said. This job is public and you and I cannot go back. And we are in the process of doing our jobs in the context of the legal system of this country. In other words, F, U, C, and K, yawned Vineta.

He showed me more photographs of dead and bloody faces.

We went outside, and on the evening street a man was waving his hands and people were listening.

What's he saying? I said.

Oh, he's saying the prisons for Muslims are worse than Auschwitz, said Vineta. How would he know? If he'd been in Auschwitz he'd be dead.

A GAME OF CARDS

The dark greenish hills made a bowl all around. On top was something which Vineta thought to be a tank, but Zhalko said: You're jumpy. —But still it was easy to imagine the tanks that Dr. Ljajic had said had been ubiquitous, pointing inward and down just like Sarajevo. We sat at the Serbian cafe, whose owner's name was in Cyrillic over the door; across the street there were many red tables on the sidewalk where the Muslims sat at their table. Vineta proposed that we play cards. We tried to buy a deck, but nobody had one for sale. Finally we went into a cafe, which turned out to be for Muslims, and the people there wouldn't loan Vineta any cards until she spoke to me in English so they'd know I was American. Then all at once they fell over themselves to bring us two decks of cards. Vineta smiled sardonically.

Later that night, while she and Zhalko were parking the car at the police station so that it wouldn't get stolen, I went to the hotel lobby and asked some shy young boys, obvious Muslim, to take my picture, which they did with delight, and then I took a photo of them. —American good! they whispered. They wanted me to send them copies and I said that I would. They couldn't leave me alone; they were so happy to be noticed. Now Vineta was in her room changing into her sweatshirt with the heart that said 100% SERBIAN and Zhalko was on his bed showing me how to play rummy with two decks when the boys came in. —American? they said to Zhalko. —Serbian, he said quietly, and their faces fell and they blushed and went away.

That evening the three of us played rummy and Zhalko laughed whenever Vineta won and yelled at her: You Serbian bitch! and they were both so nice to me, so endlessly patient with my lack of knowledge of card games, and I was happy to be their friend.

A PLEASANT VISIT

Mr. Safet Bandzovic, a Muslim, was President of the Sanzak Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms; he gave me much vaguer figures for the number of Muslims who'd fled Sanzak than the SDA man had; when I asked him to be more exact he said: Well, it's very difficult to tell you exactly. The Ministry of Internal Affairs could tell you exactly how many passports from this region have been stamped; but that's been classified top secret. —So I got Vineta to take me to the police station to ask, pointing out that it was in the interest of the Serbian government to disprove such stories. I remember tall men in bluish-grey uniforms who strode about and sometimes watched me; and once a plainclothesman came downstairs with his arm very tight around the shoulder of another man who did not struggle and Vineta said to me: Don't stare. Curiosity killed the cat. —One extremely tall and terrifying policeman who'd devoured my American passport with his furious eyes kept talking about me to his colleagues in a deep and snarling fashion until they grinned in sundry ugly ways; so I engaged in the pastime that Serbs call "playing the Englishman," which means to be indifferent, to pretend not to understand—and of course I really *didn't* understand; maybe they were saying how nice I was. Finally we were ushered upstairs. While the chunky woman with the gold watch poured pure black coffee as thick as cream from tiny copper flasks on a tray, the police chief in his plaid suit began to raise his voice. Vineta was so sweet and reasonable with him, touching her heart with her long and lovely fingers while he made clenching walls on his desk with the sides of his hands. After a while he put on his glasses and calmed down a little. But later he slammed his glasses off and his voice became deep and harsh. Vineta was so even-tempered and calm that slowly he relaxed. Finally he smiled again. I never got to ask him a single question. Vineta said it wasn't his fault; he would have helped me if he'd had authorization from Beograd; and I believed him; but the long and the short of it was that I never did find out how many Muslims had left Sanzak. Later on I mentioned how fierce everyone had seemed in that place, and she said: If anybody including the police would lay a little finger on you I'd defend you with my life, dearie!

SURPRISING INFORMATION

So instead I made her take me behind a mosque's red-and-white-needled phallus and into a store I picked at random to interview the shopkeeper; Vineta could tell from his teeth that he was a Muslim; they had a special kind of grimace, she explained. —I'm going to *kill* you! she said to me in quiet disgust.

Smiling a little anxiously, he brought us Diet Cokes.

Ask him if he feels safe here.

He says he himself has no problem. He still has Serbian friends, but they used

to drink together all the time and now since the war there is a certain coldness. He says they still drink together and play soccer together, but less often. He has stopped listening to the news. Mainly he sticks to business.

This seemed innocuous enough, and I asked Vineta why he didn't want me to write this down in front of him.

So he won't get into trouble with his party, she said. The SDA wants him to say bad things. That's their agenda.

Well, I said, nobody's proven anything to me.

Dearie, you've become a fully qualified Serb, said Vineta, patting my hand.

On the drive back to Beograd she said: You know, that Turk wasn't so bad. He was decent. If I ever saw him in Beograd I'd ask him how he was doing and buy him a drink, chat for an hour. It's just that I'd never be his friend.

And a little later she said abruptly: Sometimes I listen to Muslim music. It's all right. The melodies aren't bad. Not for all the time, but once in awhile.

A REMINDER

Here I think I need to say again that this essay is about extremists, that most of the people I met in Beograd did not think the way Vineta did. I never heard Vineta say she wished the war were over. (I know that she was unhappy much of the time, but I guess she felt that to stop now would be giving in to cowards and traitors.) But I remember the time I went with that other girl, Branka, down a street whose wall everywhere said MIR, which means peace; and then we came to a wall upon which somebody had written in Cyrillic SPO, which Branka explained meant Serbian Democratic Movement.

Are they good or bad?

Bad.

Why?

They are Chetniks.

There were Chetniks against that wall, big and tall, selling Chetnik hats and videos of Serbian dancers with big tits. Wondering what exactly the Chetniks thought of the war, I asked Branka if we could talk with them and she said they might punch me or worse but I said that was my business.

What do you think about Americans?

We dislike you and your police. In America you have a police regime. In Serbia you can say whatever you want, but in America it's not that kind of situation. In America you can never be free.

What is your goal?

I want to get peace, said the man, amazing me.

How did the war start?

Those Communist leaders like Milosevic and Tadjman wouldn't separate in a peaceful way.

For you, is the word Chetnik a good or bad word?

Very good.

What does it mean to you?

Something bright, because during the Second World War those who killed people were Communists, not Chetniks.³⁶ After the war the government wanted Communist partisans to have power, not ordinary people. Chetniks are Robin Hoods. They're here for justice.

What do you think about Croatians?

Croatians are OK, but not their government.

And Muslims?

They are not real Muslims, he said with calm defiance.

There was another man with an Eleventh Airborne Patch on his jacket, standing with his hands on his hips. —We're people who fight for our country, he said. We believe in our king. We would like peace, but your government will not permit that. I'm not a Chetnik. Real Chetniks are well-organized. I believe in God, not in our government. Thanks to Milosevic, Serbia is not a democratic country, and it uses all these lies to create a bigger criminal than it is. Here in Beograd we don't have *our* police; we have BiH police. They should be home to fight for their own country, not here. You can even find Muslims among them. Real Serbs believe in God and the monarchy, and in peace. But our government has the power, and we can't do anything.

Have you fought?

Only a few months.

What did you see?

A lot of voluntary guys went there, just for food supplements and booze and to make some robberies just like our government ministers. I was in Croatia at the beginning of the war. I would like just to end this war.

And Branka herself, who was relatively left-wing, had a war story that took place in Pale, which is a Serbian position near Sarajevo. —I couldn't eat anything, she said, stabbing the concrete with her cigarette. Five kilos I was down during the seven days. All the dead people. I was just crying. And those soldiers, those Serbian soldiers, they smile and say, wow, a woman, and I had to smile in order not to become involved with them. And we had to pay 200 deutschemarks just to enter the Bosnian border. And those people there, they don't like us because we are not real Serbs; we are not on the front line. But *our* boys go on the front line, not theirs! And they won't go to their own country! They want our boys.

So you don't believe in a Greater Serbia?

No. That's bullshit. I'm sorry. Because it is. And *they were not friendly!* I was so open. I thought we were brothers and sisters. But they don't think so.

And here in Beograd, she concluded softly, everyone was very afraid when NATO airplanes came there because we thought there would be a mobilization of

our boys, not theirs. My boyfriend is hiding. Because they just come to your place and take your hand and you go away for five months or a year. This situation, I get so angry, I don't talk...

In Novi Pazar my driver, Zhalko, had said: I believe that not all Croatians are bad—which I thought very good, since his girlfriend was half one. He was less fond of Muslims, but even on that issue he strove to be fair. We were talking about Dr. Ljajic, who'd shown me so many photos of injured people who might or might not have been Muslims, and Zhalko said: The important thing about the SDA people is that they look so good, and after that you see they're not so good. Ljajic just now, his story's not good. There is tension, but the people making tension are extremist Muslim and extremist Serb. When people don't have anything to do, they become extremist.

Why is Vineta an extremist? I said.

Maybe she has become more of an extremist than I, because when she was in the war maybe she saw some very bad things.

And I have to say another thing about Vineta which is that one particularly trying day in Beograd when practically everyone I met had been calling me an American criminal, Vineta and I were walking through the rain, she in her 100% SERBIAN sweatshirt again, drenched and coughing and sniffing, and she insisted on buying me an ice cream because she was always generous and kind to me. She pointed out all the girls' legs; and thinking of this I remember when we visited her acquaintance, a Russian volunteer (about whom more very shortly); and at the end of the interview two Chetniks came in, one a longhaired, gentle-looking guy unloading the magazine from his TT pistol. I pronounced it a *dobar komad*, this being a phrase that Vineta had taught me when she saw a pretty woman; it meant a "nice piece," so it seemed an appropriate term for a gun, too; anyway, they all laughed. Vineta had developed an eye for good-looking girls when she was in the army. So on that 100% Serbian day we were strolling in the rain past the long queue outside the not-yet-open foreign exchange place where people could switch novij dinars for deutschemarks, one to one; and somebody else had just called me an American spy and Vineta, who believed that all the articles about rape camps were lies, as perhaps they are or aren't since I've never seen one, said: I could rape two Muslim girls right now! Yes, dearie, I'm quite a capable girl. I could fuck two Muslim bitches and smoke three cigarettes all at the same time, and I'll do it right now if you can find me two Muslim bitches who don't stink... and I was trying to laugh but I was feeling tense and defiant and said things that embarrassed her, until she blew up, and in trying to apologize and explain myself I said: Well, look. You know how you felt in those interviews with the Muslims in Novi Pazar, because they weren't your kind?

Yeah. What about it? —Oh, she said with quick empathy, you feel that way in this country...?

That's right. So I get defiant and make wisecracks...

Don't feel that way. We're not against you, she said passionately. Please don't feel that way!

And she stroked my back.

"WE JUST WANNA KEEP THIS PLACE"

The big Russian cupped a tall beer in his slablike hands, staring blue-eyed across the dish of salted fish which his plump and pretty wife had brought. He handcuffed me to Vineta a couple of times for a joke. Once he got suspicious of what I was writing and handcuffed me again. During the six hours that I was with him his eyes never stopped watching me; and over and over he told me that if I was lying, that if I wrote bad lies about him he would find me and kill me. —She's real fanatic girl, he said of Vineta with a smile. Like me! Because history is come back. Because Serbia people is need me. Like brother.

You know what say her? he said, pointing at his wife. She say, it's real hard to be Orthodox now. Because everyone hates us.

He was from Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan was a Muslim place, so it was not his place. He hated it. His mother was on good terms with her Muslim neighbors, but not he... He'd fought in Lebanon. In 1988 he had gone to Greece because it was Orthodox. —*Greece is the heart*, he kept saying. —After four years he came to Serbia and joined the parachute corps. He'd been there for 83 days, half in battle. He told me the name of his commander but asked me not to write it here.

He'd been a military policeman in Afghanistan, and the Mujahideen had got him in the belly. —That was politics, he said. For what I care about politics? I shit on politics. I do it just for love, to help my Orthodox brothers and sisters.

He said that when a Soviet soldier's coffin was sent back from Afghanistan, you were not allowed to open it on penalty of thirty years' imprisonment. They sent his coffin back, and his mother thought that he'd been killed, but the coffin was full of hashish and jewelry; that was why it remained sealed, so that the criminals could get rich.

I hate myself now, because I have killed people in Afghanistan, he said. That was not my place. And this place, this is my place.

(So maybe it was true what one disgusted taxi driver said to me in Zagreb when I told him I'd just arrived from Beograd: *Beograd, das ist Russia. Zagreb ist Europa*. —I'd asked one HOS man in one of Split's marble canyons (boys playing ball between the arches): Have you fought against Russians? and he replied: In Jajce. Many times. I don't know how many.)³⁷

In Bosnia he'd lost some fingers and severely damaged his eye. Now he taught in the military school.

Before in the war, Croatians want to take the places from people. And now it's

2 Towns, Symbols of Serbian Killings, Snag Balkan Talks

By ROGER COHEN

DAYTON, Ohio, Nov. 13 — The towns of Srebrenica and Zepa are symbols of the Serbian slaughter of Muslim civilians during the Bosnian war. Now, with the negotiations to end the conflict at a critical phase, the towns have become symbols of the price of peace.

Officials involved in the talks said today that the recovery of Srebrenica and Zepa, eastern Bosnian towns overrun by the Serbs this summer, was among the territorial demands on which the Muslim-led Bosnian Government has refused to compromise. The Serbs did not relinquish the towns because they are determined to

Reclaim the
"The B
Zepa and



War Crimes Tribunal Indicts Serb Leaders

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia indicted the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, a ruling that could complicate efforts to bring peace to the war-torn region.

The tribunal also indicted the commander of the Bosnian Serb military, Gen. Ratko Mladic, as a war

Survivors Tell of Serb Atrocities in Fallen Enclave

Spy Photos Indicate Mass Grave At Serb-Held Town, U.S. Says

Evidence May Confirm Atrocities at Srebrenica

WASHINGTON, Aug. 18 — The United States said today spy photographs that it made public of what appear to be mass graves outside the town of Srebrenica, where of Muslim men and boys missing since they were last seen by Bosnian Serbs seize last month.

Bloody and Unshod, Refugees Flee Serbs

By CHUCK SUBETIC

OVCAREVO, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Oct. 18 — Ana Dajman, a 38-year-old Muslim refugee, broke down in tears as she hugged her 15-month-old daughter over the last painful yards of a four-mile hike across the mountain-side war front.



From me," he said, referring to the Serbian irregulars by the name they have bestowed on the Serbian guerrillas of World War II. "I was in my underwear until someone gave me the pair of pants and a shirt."

"These Serbs are not the United Nations, but any kind of humane army," Mr. Karadzic said.

Serbs Kill a Bosnian Leader and Take More Hostages

U.S. Gives Accounts of Serbian Atrocities to U.N.

Bosnian Soldiers Report Massacre by Serbs in a Schoolhouse

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 22 — The United States turned over to the United Nations today a compilation of data it has gathered from a variety of sources recounting the killing and torture of thousands of men, women and children.

By CHUCK SUBETIC

TRZINJE, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Oct. 22 — The first Bosnian Government official to return from an eastern refugee camp in Serbia indicated today that he had seen a mass grave of Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica, which was overrun by Serbs in July.

Mr. Mladic and his other senior officers were seen in the town of Srebrenica, which was overrun by Serbs in July. Mr. Mladic was seen with a woman who had had the town of Srebrenica since July 11, 1995. They had been in the town since July 11, 1995.

Mr. Karadzic said he also saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica. He said he saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica. He said he saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica.

Serbs Hold 5,000 Hostages Fleeing the War in Sarajevo

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, May 20 — Serbian leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina said today that their guerrillas would not release about 5,000 women, children and elderly people being held in a Sarajevo suburb until the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina lifted blockades of Yugoslav Army barracks and other installations.

On Tuesday night, Serbian gunmen halted a column of about 1,000 cars, 20 buses and 10 vans in the suburb of Hlika as the refugees attempted to leave Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. Serbian forces have besieged and bombarded Hlika and its capital for more than a month in an effort to partition the republic.

A Vain Call for Help, as Serbs Killed His Wife

By CAROLYN A. GALE

METZ, France, Oct. 22 — One of the most dramatic scenes in the war-torn town of Metz, France, was the death of a man who had been held in a Serbian prison camp. He was killed by Serbs in Metz, France.

Mr. Karadzic said he also saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica. He said he saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica. He said he saw the bodies of 11 children in the town of Srebrenica.

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2,500 Dead, 7,000 Wounded

Officials of the Children's Embassy, a local relief group that organized the

the same. And I don't wanna give up my brother's people. So I come back for help my brother's people, if they need it. These people need it. My wife has two sisters and one brother, but her brother is dead now in Herzegovina. War is shit, you know. We don't want it.

Above him hung Vojislav Seselj's likeness—three times in the living room alone; I forget how many times elsewhere. The flat belonged to an SRS party member. Seselj was blond and spectacled, with a prim mouth. I never interviewed him because he charged everybody except Greeks \$500 for that privilege and when I asked Vineta what he spent the money on she said: Weapons, of course! —It made me happy to look at him and think that Vineta had turned his marriage offer down. —Seselj is a very good man, and he has a very good heart, the Russian said. Helps for children which don't have fathers in war. Really quiet and really good man.

We don't wanna take the other places, said the Russian. We just wanna keep this place. Because this is our Slavonic place. Serbia, Greece, Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, these are the Orthodox places. What does the Mussulman want to do in this place, to kill the womans, to kill the childrens? Mussulmans don't wanna stay normal, don't wanna stay quiet. They wanna take the government.

Normal Mussulmans, I don't hate. I don't wanna fight with the children and the women. Only some Mussulmans. Mussulmans have to be quiet here, because it's not their place.

He said he might tell me a story, but not until he'd drunk away the badness. After three or four beers, his eyes still glowingly affixed upon me while his plump and pretty wife leaned back smoking cigarettes and playing with her fingers, he began to speak to me, this time in Serbo-Croatian while Vineta translated beside me, wearing her black gloves that felt like stockings.

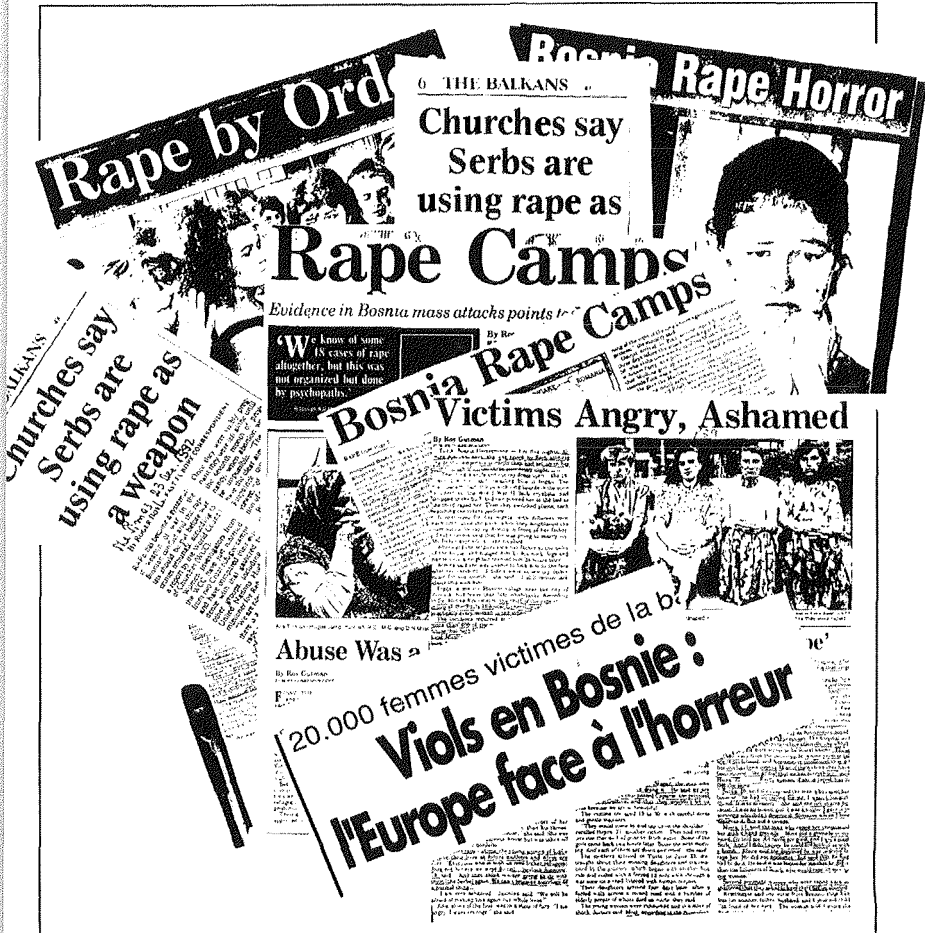
He said: It happened on the eighth of November 1992, in the village of Vranjevici, near Mostar. There'd been a cease-fire for fifteen days. And then they started a grenade attack near the village of Nevesinje, which was an ethnically clean Serbian city, small but completely Serbian. It was mostly Croats who attacked. Their soldiers advanced toward Nevesinje. It was an emergency, so as a member of the Special Forces I felt a responsibility to act.

(The Russian smiled, leaning forward and clenching the stump of his hand. His wife sat beside him, her earrings so dull against her big pale cheek. They'd met at the front. She was the one who when he was late for a date figured that he'd been hurt, so she jumped into an APC, went straight to the battle line, and threw twelve grenades which killed five Muslims.)

Well, it was a tough day, really, he said. The Special Forces squad soon realized that the Muslims and Croats had come very deeply into our territory. We had eight guys in our squad. There was the first front line, then the second front line, and the third front line, so we had to go very deep into enemy territory. At the first front line, four of our men were killed. At the second, two more got killed, so when we

It is a tragic fact that in the wars of men, the most numerous victims are women. Rape is an inseparable part of the tragic history of war. But, as far as women are concerned, peace is no better. The U.S. Justice Department's statistics indicate that the United States has 1,770 rapes per day, or apx. 430,000 reported cases each year and 92% of these cases never come to trial. [According to CNN May 29th, 1993]. How does the war in Bosnia differ? Because judging by the media, in this war, the rape of Moslem women is part of the morbid political arsenal of the Serbs. In order to simplify their job, they organise special camps for rape.

On what foundations was this monstrous construction built? Simply, just like in the case of the "death camps", the public believed unquestioningly in their media stars.



THE MEDIA HAPPENED TO BE THERE

From a Serbian publication

reached the third front line it was only me and one other. And grenades and shooting everywhere—we could not run a hundred meters without a grenade going off. You cannot imagine how it feels when you lose six friends in one day. It wasn't the territory of our enemy, but our own territory. We were just protecting ourselves. And in that action we couldn't take the dead bodies of our mates back with us. So the enemy cut the head off one of my dead mates and threw it into one of the trenches of the regular Serbian army. The enemy was very close—that is, fifteen, ten meters. Well, we were kind of revolted, I guess. We fought back. The first task of the squad was to stop the advance of the enemy, and the second was if possible to recapture our own territory, and after that to try to keep the enemy in position, because we were completely exhausted, without any backup. Out of the eight people, as I said, there were only two of us, and then one was killed by a sniper, so I was left alone.

The Russian glared into my soul with his haunted, half-sightless eyes.

There were some other Serbs, too, not from the same platoon. There were about ten people in the hundred meters I could see from my little hill. It was very difficult to keep those positions, and what saved us was the huge quantity of grenades and ammunition we had. We would have all gotten killed by the enemy if we hadn't had that. What also helped us was that we had tear gas, and the enemy was like drugged lunatics, attacking in waves.

Well, said Vineta, he's actually describing for you what he calls a wave. The closest was five meters to us, so of course he had to kill them all. The waves were one-half to one meter apart. He says that as soon as we destroyed the first wave, another wave would come. They would crawl down, covered with camouflage, disguised as bushes, but my new mates from the other platoon and I were all kind of jumpy. It happened once at night that an enemy soldier grabbed one of the Serbs' guns, so I fired thirty bullets into his face and it was really horrible. Every night the Serbs used the darkness to resupply the position. We could not sleep or do anything but fight for three days and three nights. And after that, on the fourth day, the situation was kind of stabilized, and we regained the old front line which they had taken when they pushed into our territories. But it still went on. By the fifth day we were really crazy. We were singing songs, screaming, shooting nonstop. Our enemies got crazy, too. We used to tell jokes together on the radio, to arrange appointments to have a drink: hello, brother, let's get together. And meanwhile we were still fighting. They tried to come behind us, and they cut the throat of one of our soldiers silently, so that's how they broke our line in one place, but they couldn't do us any permanent harm. They thought we didn't have gas masks but we did. They were very self-confident, and acted as if nobody could do them any harm, but we killed all the more. For instance, this is how I got my Kalashnikov, my war trophy. Everybody used to improvise trenches from stones. One of our guys jumped into the trench, killed the two Croatians, and took their Kalashnikovs, one for them, one for

me. The JNA³⁸ used to produce the same uniform for everybody, so Croats and Muslims still had the same uniform, the real Serbian uniform. So it was so confusing and so frightening. Once our own side started shooting at me. I put my hands over my head. I practically pissed in my pants. But sometimes this confusion worked in our advantage, like the time we tricked two other Croatians. The Croats have a special dialect, you see. We deceived the Croatian guard by speaking in his dialect, saying; Go ahead, brother, put your feet up and I'll cover for you. It was dark and the Croats couldn't see. We started smoking. The Croatians warned us: Be careful of the Chetniks. We said OK. Then we were close enough to kill them. This is war. You have to do it like that if you want to live. And always there was such terror.³⁹ But the most frightening moment came when a friend of mine, hearing the whistle of a grenade, wanted to hide himself but got hit by the grenade anyway and was torn to pieces in front of my eyes. What was left was only pieces of meat. Before that we had just drunk two glasses of rakija. I couldn't take his dead body or help him. It happened only eight days later that I could take his pieces...

The next gloomy moment of my life was when I had to collect all the dead bodies from the battlefield to the base. Since we were all in the same uniform, we didn't know if we were collecting Ustashas or Muslims or what. I also want to mention two brave girls, nurses, who helped remove the bodies. One went crazy because she saw everything, poor girl, and she is still sick. Anyway, when we brought them in, one of the commanders said: What the hell did you drag in these Ustashas for? —They found out by going through their documents. Our guys have photos in their booklets; the others do not.

That broad face came closer to mine. The deep eyes tried to suck my soul in under the thick eyebrows. He stretched out his huge arms and touched me. Then he said to me: There was one Croat who had his leg wounded; and when I jumped into the trench I found him. He didn't know I was a Russian. He said to me: Don't shoot—we were neighbors once! —And I said: We never lived together. —Then I shot him.

(The Russian smiled as he said this.)

I was teasing Vineta, partly to reduce the tension that I felt in that place with the Russian's eyes never leaving mine and the wife smiling quietly beside him and the posters of Seselj everywhere, Seselj who'd gone on the record as saying that if the Bosnian Muslims kicked up any fuss they'd just have be kicked all the way to Anatolia;⁴⁰ and the tension that came when the Russian tried to sell me an antique Croatian crucifix of solid silver and an antique Qur'-An and when I asked him where he got them he just grinned and said: Never mind where I got them... so I kept flirting with Vineta, partly because I liked her well and partly to get his eyes off me, and finally it seemed to work; finally his gaze tracked on her for a moment and he said to me: I'll tell you the key to her heart. First, you must stay here forever. Second, you must learn to speak Serbian. Third, you must fight in the war. Fourth,

you must really love this place.

OK, darling, I'll marry you, said Vineta. Just bring me the head of Alija Izetbegovic on a plate for my wedding present—oh, and a Stinger missile to destroy Sarajevo.

Ignoring her, the Russian said suddenly in English: Listen. I kill the Muslims and the Croats in my territory. But not in their territory. I'm a soldier. I am not a killer. We are Special Forces, you know. We must kill him to take back our territory.

What he really wanted now was for me to join the Special Forces that minute, and my excuses of unreadiness tore away from me like cobwebs. His green and shining eyes always locked on my own for those six hours, and he continually said: Now we must to be or not to be. If I like you, I like you. If I not like you I cut your throat!

Finally he said: OK. I give you the brother test. Don't be afraid. I'm your friend.

No! cried Vineta. Oh, God, he's going to do some stupid thing...

In Sarajevo a Muslim had once held a loaded gun to my head as a party trick. I figured that this would be either a gun or a knife. It was a knife. He came back from the closet with a long bayonet and put the blade an inch under my chin. I didn't think he meant to hurt me, particularly if I stayed calm and still, which I did. I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd pressed a little, or cut me superficially across my throat, but he didn't even do that. He just allowed me to feel that long, chilly edge against my flesh for perhaps a minute and a half, then abruptly hurled the weapon across the room.

Now you see, he said. Now you know how it feels. War is shit. Let's drink to peace.

Looking over at Vineta now that I was free to turn my head again, I saw that her knuckles were white.

He had me dress up in his Serbian military uniform, heavy and camouflage-islanded and clammy with his sweat (the handcuffs on the chair beside it) to prove that I wasn't afraid. Vineta became sweet and giggly and said: I didn't know you were so good-looking. Did you know you're handsome in a uniform?

But the Russian never stopped watching me. Every now and then he'd ask me what guarantee there was that I wasn't a liar.

I guarantee it with my life! shouted Vineta, and for that I loved her.

Aside from her, he said, staring. What is your guarantee?

None, I said wearily.

Listen. I must be very careful with Americans now, he said. (This was the day that the U.S. Embassy in Beograd had begun to evacuate some staff families, in preparation as I assumed for another airstrike on Gorazde.) —Are you a liar or are you not a liar? The word liar is written on your forehead. Understand?

Sure, I said.

Listen, he said. If you write lies in your newspaper, I will get you. Or maybe I cannot get you, but if not, then for your lies five more Americans will die, or maybe three. Understand?

I don't like to be threatened, I said.

I'm sorry, he said. But you must understand. I hate America, but I hate Russia equally. I talk same with Russians. Listen. Why not come with me? You must train for three months. I'll take your documents so that you cannot leave. You must stay illegal in Serbia. No one will know who you are. I will teach you in my school how to drive a tank, how to jump with a parachute, how to draw a pistol so fast like this⁴¹—ah, it's very hard. Some men die in the training. You must become a robot. The training for your Marines, it's nothing. In Russian Special Forces it was so much better. And the training for them, that's nothing. Only here in Serbian Special Forces can you become a real man. Understand? And after the three months you must begin to work for five months. I'll give you food, I'll give you sleep, I'll give you cigarettes. Then you'll know everything. What do you say?

Maybe later, I said...

TOO MANY HEROES

More and more I felt how alone and lonely Vineta was. There'd been an old man who gave me such a sad and serious look as I passed him wearing my Chetnik cap with its Orthodox cross and its four C's, two forwards, two backwards, which stood for *Only Unity Saves the Serbs*; and then a streetcar driver who thought I was a Serb stuck his head out the window and yelled: I shit on your party!

I told Vineta about it, but she wasn't very surprised. —Well, actually, Beograd is sixty percent not Serb anyhow, she said.

What is it?

Croats, Muslims, Albanians. Real scum.

A man turned and stared at her.

They're mostly smugglers and drug dealers, she went on.

Increasingly she reminded me of an old line in Sir Thomas Wyatt: *I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain*.

Smiling happily or frowning on the phone, tapping her cigarette out in the ash-tray with a series of businesslike gestures, her short dark hair flaring out at the back of her neck, her deep dark eyes, no matter what she did there was something about her that almost broke my heart. She almost never talked about what had happened to her at Vukovar and what she'd done there; but one day she told me how her brother had run away at twelve and hitchhiked across Serbia to join the army and fight at Vukovar, which the Croats still held, and when they found him he was so cold and hungry and scared; after Vineta joined up her father joined up, too... She longed to do good and sacrifice herself for what she believed in. She was a woman dedicated to action, a patriot as she saw it; she feared and she hated, but she was no hypocrite. And I felt that she was so alone.

Soon I was going to have to go to the other side. That was my job. She despised the thought of my visiting Croatia, of course. It exasperated and infuriated her that

I wanted to have anything to do with “those bastards.” But after she saw she couldn’t talk me out of it, she helped me get a bus ticket to Zagreb and they said that couldn’t be done and Vineta stared at them with her arms folded, saying: Anybody who fucks me against my will is going to get *fucked*. Don’t worry, babe. I’ll get you to Zagreb.

I know sometimes I’m aggressive, said Vineta once. (She’d grown up in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Beograd.) I was so aggressive when I came back from Vukovar. Now I don’t like to wear my uniform so much. But you know what? When I put S—’s uniform on, it felt good. *It felt good!* she said so plaintively. And I know I was rude to you three—no, four times today. You’re the sweetest person I’ve ever worked with. I want to be a tender girl. I should be. I want to put on high heels and a tight dress, but I just don’t feel comfortable wearing them now. Just like I wouldn’t feel comfortable in Zagreb anymore. Well, I never liked Zagreb anyway...

And one day she told me. She’d been two months pregnant when her boyfriend of three years had been captured by the Croats, in Borovo-naselje near Vukovar. They cut his body into pieces. She got an abortion and became a soldier. Her best friend had been repeatedly raped until she killed herself. Vineta kept their tiny photos in her billfold. When she pulled them out to show me, she began to cry silently. I put my hand on her shoulder. —I’m sorry I’m weak, she said in a voice that quavered slightly.

And she said to me: No one has a chance to open my heart ever again.⁴²

“WILL YOU BE MY FRIEND?”

That night I went to a disco with the old German baron I mentioned who was a war correspondent; he needed to get laid. I just wanted to be with the baron, because he was somebody I was sure didn’t hate me. He picked out two girls for us and pulled me over to their table. I looked into the face of the nineteen-year-old he’d assigned me to and wished her a good evening.

Who are you? she said. Tell me who you really are.

I’m an American, I said. I’m a journalist. I came to Serbia to learn and to make friends.

Are you a *spion*? she said.

No, I’m not a spy.

Who are you?

Who do you think I am?

I think you’re a criminal, she said, laughing in terror.

I’m not a criminal. Why do you think that?

You are a stranger. You are nothing to us. But you come to our country. And you hate us.

I don’t hate you.

But Americans hate us.

Some of them do.

Why?

Our TV says that you kill Muslim babies, I explained.

But that's not true. Why do you lie about us?

I thought of the dead Muslim babies I'd seen in Sarajevo. I also thought of the Muslim irregulars I'd met in Sarajevo who had a spiked paddle which they called a "Chetnik teacher," and I said: Sometimes I think American TV does tell lies about you. They say bad things about you but not about the others. I don't know why they aren't more fair. But I want to be your friend. Will you believe me?

No. I won't believe you.

Look, I said (one of Vineta's favorite openers, although her favorite expression was probably: *I'll say this only once*). Serbia is dangerous for me. Most people here hate me. And I could be killed in Bosnia next week. I'm only here to understand. What else could I get out of being here?

Money.

Well, my magazine does pay me, but nobody could pay me enough if I got killed. Can't you see that?

I don't know.

I've showed you my passport and my press card. I've hidden nothing from you.

(The Baron was laughing in my ear, sure that at any moment the girls would go with us and participate in what he called "a crazy situation.")

I don't know. I don't know.

Will you be my friend?

Finally she smiled. —OK. I am your friend.

I left the Baron still struggling to seduce the other girl, waved to my friend whom I would never see again, and went out into the rainy night.

TOO MANY HEROES

...And so I turned away from the windows of a bookshop laden with Serbian-crested books and Russian icons, as insistent a monoculture as the Communist stuff had been, and I sat down in the park on Boulevard Revolucije whose beech trees moved so tall and leafy and spacious green with that new green of late April above the old men talking and listening and slowly raising their cigarettes, the prostitutes kicking their high heels off as they checked makeup in their little round mirrors; the little boys, some in camouflage pants, whose fathers brought them to the swing; the ladies sitting down for a laugh and a chat, guarding bulging grocery bags between their ankles; the red rubber balls and swinging children and wagging dogs' tails and jump-roping girls—all the life swarming with the energy of almost-summer beneath those gracious green roofs of leaves; spring was here and with it another

NATO ultimatum. When I bought sausage and cheese to go sit there in the park they wanted to know where I was from and I said the USA and they shook their heads and said no good. That morning at the Hotel Serbia I'd asked the desk clerk how he was and he said: Not too well. Because maybe NATO will bomb again at Gorazde.

I'm sorry, I said.

Oh, well. You are not the government. You are only a man, like me.⁴³

At the far table in the restaurant Goran and a waiter sat staring down at the press reports, talking quietly. Goran leaned over his newspaper so low that it seemed he'd lost something in the print; maybe if he read carefully enough he might regain it. The waiter beside him slumped on his elbows like a former electroshock patient I used to know. The waiter did not read the paper. Goran gripped a pencil tightly in his hand. After a long time he spoke softly with the others, gazing at the table.

Your problem is that you're producing such artificial movies full of heroes, Vineta had told me, staring at me so intensely from under her thick dark eyebrows. You have too many heroes on TV. You lost all the bloody wars. You shouldn't have dropped those fuckin' bombs on Japan. And what you did in Panama, that was really horrible. But I do respect Americans because they can make a documentary against their own country. We wouldn't want to kill Americans. We hope the infantry come, not the air force, so we can *see* them and offer them a drink and become brothers. Why should your guys give up their lives over some shitty Islamic state? They're so far away from your culture. Of course they like handsome women with long legs and so on, but already they've started introducing that kind of life. Don't you know that in Iran women can't even watch TV? The only thing they want is your power.

Look, she said went on. You will kill plenty of Serbs, hundreds and thousands with your bombs. But we will kill double that number of your soldiers and we will do many things out of spite. But we would really like to be friends. But if that is not possible, we know how to be very cruel.

So I was in the park, and I thought of Vesna Hadzivukovic, who'd smiled at me, brushed back her hair, and said quietly: I was in Banja Luka, and I tell you people are almost happy when they face themselves with a serious military power. Half the Serbs in Beograd would like to sign the capitulation. But in the rest of Serbia—ah, we have rockets of different size, and we would fight to the last breath. —And I thought again of Vineta, always of Vineta, who swore she'd welcome the American bombers if and when they came to Beograd; she'd climb the highest skyscraper with her Kalashnikov and try to shoot one of the bastards down...

ZAGREB, REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

The Joint Commission has therefore been rendered largely inoperative by Serb non-cooperation.

UNITED NATIONS, REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL,
(16 MARCH 1994)⁴⁴

MEN IN UNIFORM

Tudjman's wry mouth was on television (one story was that it came from the days when he'd been a fish and Tito hooked him but he fell back into the water; the other tale, actually the same, said it had gotten that way when he was conspiring against the Communists to form his party, the HDZ, and had to keep whispering out of the side of his mouth). Tudjman was still boss in Croatia. In Beograd hardly anybody cared for Milosevic (He likes to hurt people and this country, that girl Branka had said. Hurt runs through his veins. Only the old people like him. They think it doesn't matter if we kill all together for our dignity). And in Zagreb—about which Vineta had complained: The problem with Zagreb is that it's too western-like, too British-like, too stiff. You're not allowed to sing in a restaurant or a cafe when you get drunk! —in Zagreb, and in Split and Imotsky and everywhere else in Croatia I visited, few cared for Tudjman. Tudjman was soft on the Serbs. Tudjman was a Muslim-lover. Tudjman was a Communist. Tudjman had thrown away Krajina in exchange for western Bosnia (this accusation I heard whenever I neared the airport and got trapped in the long line of cars on whose drivers cops were running the "Chetnik test," entering their names into a data base; Serbian-held territory was now only twenty kilometers away). Tudjman had started the violence. Tudjman had permitted Milosevic to start the violence. This contradictory catalogue of criticisms was all too typical of the war, which had created hatreds whose objects drifted and wandered with heartbreaking aimlessness, a war that almost nobody understood.⁴⁵ Some had showed off pistols and machine guns in Zagreb's restaurants at the very beginning; one rarely saw that now; there were so many who didn't care, who never had; or, to quote Vineta again: My personal impression was that the Croats in Croatia were not keen on having Ustasha again. But there *were* groups who wanted to bring back that fucking darkness again. And they killed about fifty Serbs right before it all started. —The Croats, of course, told the story differently, but the upshot was the same; so I kept wondering how people got sucked in until one afternoon when my friend Lirija took me to Mass at Zagreb Cathedral to pray for two friends and colleagues of mine who'd been killed near Mostar; and although she had a sore throat she whispered to me the crux of each hymn and Bible reading. She was not rich, and many of her friends were positively poor, such as the professor, recently become a widow, whose salary was so constrict-

ed that her four children drank water instead of milk and never had meat. Lirija was a good woman, perhaps even a holy woman. She prayed with me, and with deep reverence showed me the marble face of Archbishop Stepinac, imprisoned under Tito; before that Stepinac was apparently a silent accomplice to the wartime murders of Serbs.⁴⁶ When we were coming out of church, Lirija and I met someone else she knew, a man no longer young who'd just enlisted in the army for three years because the five hundred deutschemarks per month he'd get was much better than anything else he could hope for; he'd never completed secondary school and couldn't feed his three daughters. I could see that he was less than thrilled with his new career. At least if he were killed the government would help support his girls...

So many of the soldiers I've talked to on all three sides, particularly the urbanites, did not want to go to war at first. But the words of that Serb from Novi Sad still echo inside my skull: *It's easy. In my town all you'd have to do would be to go to where some Serb lived and throw in a hand grenade, then shoot some Croats. A small group of professionally trained people could do it. Then you spread the news and arm the survivors.* In West Mostar I met a soldier who had faith in private armies. Originally he hadn't hated anybody. He was the one who told me about a village about ten kilometers south of Knin in which four friends of his were arrested by the Serbs. —They were tortured, he said after awhile.

How were they tortured?

I don't want to ask him and he doesn't want to talk about it, said my translator. Look how his hands are shaking.

We had only one hundred bullets, the man went on after awhile. Then we were walking twelve hours on the mountain to escape and save our lives...

No doubt Lirija's friend would soon have experiences like that, too. Then he'd be what we call a *motivated* soldier. (Or, as the Russian volunteer had put it in Beograd: It's easy to get brave. After awhile you're just full of hatred.) I think that's why Lirija's husband, tall and intelligent, who scraped by with his *Elektrotechnik* firm, feared that a class of permanent soldiers would be created by the conditions of the war, and that they would prolong the war. I saw one of them in shiny black boots, coming into the toy store, with his pistol in the upside-down holster against his right hand; he crossed his legs and leaned on the counter, blond and boyish; the pretty clerk smiled at him. Outside, the sidewalk was getting freckled with rain, and people stared from the streetcar windows as the clerk said she hated Serbs because they were always the aggressors, but then she said: But I like so much that Serbian girl at the snack bar next door, you know, because she is normal, and the soldier laughed and said: You want me to shoot her?

In wartime, one's ability to implement policy is determined by the number of soldiers one has. Hence all the ideologues in Serbia, Bosnia, Krajina and Croatia with private armies. Tudjman of course was a major player; in Croatia his army was *the* army, not a private army at all; and everyone said he also exercised controlling

interest in the Cro Army's Bosnian counterpart, HVO. But just as Vineta's admirer Mr. Seselj had his own shock troops to express his own vision of Greater Serbia, so in Zagreb Tudjman had to keep an uneasy eye on Dobroslav Paraga, whom the writer Misha Glenny calls "the leader of the fascist Croatian Party of Rights,"⁴⁷ or HSP. HSP was founded in 1861. According to Mr. Paraga, that made it the oldest party in southeastern Europe.⁴⁸ In 1932 it was banned and one of its leaders murdered, as Paraga said, "under orders of the Serbian King Alexander." (Alexander was assassinated in 1934, and it seems that HSP might have had something to do with it.)⁴⁹ The other leaders were killed or sent into exile. The ban was maintained for the next fifty-nine years. In 1990, when Communism died in Yugoslavia and other parties became possible again, HSP was resurrected, and Paraga became president. Needless to say, HSP had its military arm, called HOS, about whom my Croatian driver, Teo, said: I think that five to ten percent of them are good people who are bravely fighting for a better future. The rest are criminals.

Why are you in HOS? I asked a man in Split.

Because HOS men fought for all Croatians, not just for their own villages. HOS is the first unit who fought.⁵⁰

This man was one of the ones whom Lirija's husband had spoken about. He was hard and determined. He would fight to the end. There were so many like him.

For me, HOS is very nice people, another man told me. They is very good fighter. They is first Croatian soldier. I'm not in HOS but I'm in normal Fourth Brigade in Split. They are the best fighters in all Croatia.

When I visited Zagreb's trammed and cobblestoned streets in 1992, HOS men were in uniform everywhere. But Tudjman bided his time, and was finally able to make use of a split between Paraga and his rival, Japic. Since Japic was less of a threat than Paraga, a Croatian court ruled that Japic's organization was the legal HSP, not Paraga's. Meanwhile there was also, as Paraga told me, "a trial in a military court, under the accusation that I founded HOS to make a coup." And so HOS was banned. It seemed that Paraga was either finished or else at a lull in his career, like Hitler after the failed Munich Putsch. Subsequent to a police raid in which his collection of weapons was confiscated,⁵¹ Paraga had moved his office a couple of blocks away, to a small and grubby flat at whose door one had to ring and be scrutinized before it was possible to go inside. I followed these rules. A man in boots and a camo uniform told me to sit down and took my passport. He showed me some "Chetnik money" he'd taken off a dead Serb. A dog chain hung on the wall (the pit bull was in the back room). Red, blue and white streamers issued from a plaster medallion of a mustached saint, a white-chocolate Stalin; actually the nineteenth-century Croatian nationalist Ante Starcevic. —He was the first to talk about an independent Croatia, said the HOS man proudly.⁵²

The HOS man had been hit by Serbian bullets five times. He bared his arm, showing me a shell wound he'd gotten from Arkan, whom Misha Glenny, even-

handed in his criticisms, has called “a Mafia-style criminal wanted in Sweden,” responsible for “some of the most frightful crimes of the Yugoslav war.”⁵³—Vineta of course knew a different Arkan. She said that he was a really nice guy, that Serbian girls loved him, that she’d *heard* he was great in bed. She said that he’d always played fair until the day that two of his soldiers were tortured to death in a particularly hideous way by the Croatian side, which then held a news conference saying that they were Croats who’d been murdered by Serbs. After that, Arkan said: No more prisoners for the rest of this war! —She said that she’d once been present when a Croatian town he’d besieged had refused to surrender, and after giving them two minutes Arkan had begun to shell. As one house burst into flames, they’d heard a baby crying. Arkan had run in and rescued the infant, even though it was Croatian, and as he came dashing back to the Serbian lines a Croatian bullet wounded him in the arm. Now he was through with war, Vineta said. He’d done enough. He was in Beograd taking care of his bakery.

I asked the HOS man what he thought of Arkan, and he spat on the floor.

He showed me another wound. —You’re strong, I said to him. —I know, he replied smilingly.

At 2:30 his friend in the black leather jacket with four pistols underneath took the pit bull out for a walk, and the one with the wounds locked the door behind him, as he did whenever anyone went out.

At last he took me into the first sanctum whose barred windows looked down upon the street. There was an HSP poster in English which said CROATIAN PARTY OF RIGHTS and another poster which said JUBAN I SNAGA—LOVE AND STRENGTH over an image of Paraga and his family.

“IN WAR YOU ARE ALL ALONE”

The amazing thing about this three-cornered war, as I keep saying, was that every possible combination of alliance and hatred existed. At the beginning, Serbs were fighting Croats and Muslims. Then Croats were fighting Muslims and Serbs. When Francis and I were there, Muslims had begun to fight Muslims in Bihac; and throughout Bosnia the HVO, the Croatian Defense Organization, was forming a unified command of Croats and Muslims but at the same time Muslims and Croats expected to be at each other’s throats again in Mostar at any moment. The case of HOS exemplified these complexities. Paraga had raised his HOS brigades at the beginning to fight Serbs, and I remembered what Vineta had said about Paraga: He’s an extremist, but he’s all right. He’s our open enemy, and we Serbs like that. Tudjman is exterminating Serbs in Croatia, but Paraga just wants us to leave. If they want to tell us, I’ll cut your fucking Serbian throat if you don’t leave in forty-eight hours, I’ll think about it, I’ll say, all right, I’ll stink in Serbia, not in Croatia anymore, just give me some time to pack my fucking stuff. —But in Imotsky a HOS

soldier in camouflage whose red hair was slowly going grey told me: Before, the Serbs fired at us. But now they save our lives from the Muslims! (He still didn't have any Serbian friends, of course. One of his in-laws was warned in a friendly fashion by the family after marrying a Serbian girl that he'd better not come around anymore.)

I'll tell you how it was, the HOS man said, happy over a carafe of homemade wine and some water glasses of rakija. First the Serbs attacked the Croats. Then they began slaughtering the Muslims, first in Visegrad, then Zvornik, Sarajevo... You see, the Muslims weren't prepared. Then the Serbs found allies in the Muslims. How? Some very extreme Muslims said that Serbs have Serbia and Croats have Croatia, so Muslims have Bosnia; and then the problem started. The Muslims from Bosnia pulled west from the Serbs and were pushed into Croatian space. So they raised their guns at the Croats; after that we had to make an arrangement with the Serbs...

That was sad and strange enough, that a fighting force created to attack Serbs had made truce with them to fight Muslims. What made it even sadder was that a number of the men in that force repudiated its creator. The HOS man in Split was not the only one to tell me that he hated Paraga for being anti-Croatian. I thought at first that this might have been the result of Paraga's rupture with Japic, to whom the HOS man might perhaps feel more loyal, but when I asked how he felt about the latter he only replied: Politics is one thing. War is another. I don't care about politics. In central Bosnia, Zagreb gives the orders. No one in Zagreb sees Vitez. —Then the parallel with Hitler became even stronger. These men were like the brownshirts—street fighters who didn't worry their heads too much about grand strategy; the brownshirts would have had little use for Hitler, too, had he had no charisma; and Paraga—when I met him, at least—had none. The HOS man (whose wife was crazy and thought that the Chetniks were in the electricity; on TV there appeared a mostly naked woman and she said the Chetniks must have done it) poured himself more rakija and said: Paraga is Paraga, yesterday is yesterday and today is today. Now it is Croat versus Muslim and Muslim versus Muslim. We fight for two by two meters. This is not war. This is so terrible. This is not war. — And he sat there gloomily.

He had a wrinkled forehead, cropped greying hair and a tiny earring with a steely glitter. He said: War is for men. That is normal. But now I have seen five hundred women killed, so many children without arms and legs. War comes to your house. In war you are all alone.

This is how it was, he said. We had one woman, a Croatian, in a Croatian village. The village was called Bukinje Kuce at Vitez. And that woman had a husband in Zenica, and that woman was with us. It happened a few days after Christmas. She established contact with her husband by letter. She betrayed the Croatian side. She brought the Croatian people to the front lines to drink coffee. While they were drinking coffee, she called in a Muslim sabotage unit, which she hid. At 4:00 in the morning, she brought these Muslims into the Croatian village and then told them

where the army sleeps. They massacred all the soldiers. Only the youngest one they let live. He was a Croatian from Travnik. They took him to Zenica. They didn't want him to see that they were killing the others. Then they brought him to make an interview on Bosnian TV, how they didn't touch anyone. After that they brought him to the front line where we had our position. They tortured him so that we could hear his screams.

How did they torture him?

He was tied up with a chain and they led him along the same as a dog, stabbing with knives and needles. When we refused to give up, they killed him. All the people they killed, they left in a garden where we could see.

So that was sad enough, as I said, and it goes without saying that if the Muslims were doing those things to Croatians then the Croatians must be doing equivalent things to Muslims, so it is even sadder that one night after the death of my friend Francis I was sitting at the river's edge in East Mostar, which is Muslim-held, with two young soldiers of the Armija Bosnia i Hercegovina who'd said that they wanted never to leave Mostar no matter what; and across the old river the old houses and churches were just beginning to go two-dimensional and grey in the twilight, and fisherman paced the lower ledges of the shaded river-cliffs—not Croatians as I had supposed but Muslims (Bosnians they called themselves, or sometimes Bosniacs); because here the river curved to the east, into Muslim territory; and topping them was a plateau of green field and then an immense belly of green and stony hill where it was very dangerous thanks to the HVO bunkers. The two Muslims said that they liked Paraga! Seselj was shit, but Paraga was a good man, they said. HVO had liquidated the worst HOS commanders and now everything was OK.

That was how the whole war was, I thought. HOS had been formed to defend Croatians from Serbs, but they had nothing against Serbs; no, the bad guys were Muslims; and the Muslims had nothing against HOS because the bad guys were Serbs; it was a Chinese puzzle which could not be solved. —A Basque convert to Islam with whom I stayed that night and who slept with a loaded pistol in his pants said when I asked him about Paraga: It's so difficult. I hate fascists. My grandfather fought fascism and lost. But here in Mostar we don't hate HOS. They want Muslims and Croats together against the Serbs. So that's good—but it's no good, he said in agony, because they hate all Serbs and I don't hate them all, only Chetniks. And they fight between HOS and HVO, always fighting, always fighting...

“BY FAR MY GREATEST INFLUENCE IS POLITICAL”

So I arrived at the inner office where Dobroslav Paraga stood in his wide red tie with the gold diamonds. He had a very clean, refined, even delicate face.

What message do you want to give the world? I asked him.

The Croatian nation is in a great war which they must not lose, he said, looking

through papers. They're fighting at the same time against the aggressor, Greater Serbia, and the imposition of a dictatorship in Croatia.

He sat down.

It's unfortunate that Croatia is struggling against the occupier, he said. Tudjman has a pact with them, with Milosevic.⁵⁴ The territory which Croatia lost in the Croatia-Serbian war was lost because Tudjman gave it away to gain other prey for Croatia. I was the first to say this five years ago. This was the basis of my politics. From 1991, I and my party were seeking an alliance between Croatia and Sarajevo against occupying forces. Tudjman used the most drastic means to destroy this alliance.

How?

Tudjman killed the vice-president of my party, Ante Paradzik, who had openly criticized him for cooperating with Milosevic.

In prison?

Yes. He ordered his murder. He killed a HOS general in Bosnia also—Blaz Kraljevic. This man was working for unity between Croatians and Muslims in Bosnia. That is why Tudjman ordered him killed.⁵⁵ Now, for the last eight months, Tudjman has particularly forbidden any work in the party.

When did you first get involved in politics?

When I began human rights work, said Paraga in his low and reasonable voice. —From my work I suffered quite a bit in Belgrade and was put in jail. The American Senate passed a resolution in my favor. I started openly fighting for human rights after Tito's death.

What were your conditions in prison like?

I was in a concentration camp on Goli Otok. During Tito's life this was used to liquidate political opponents. More than a thousand political prisoners were killed. World pressure obliged them to shut it down. There's a 200 kilometer-per-hour wind there.⁵⁶

What's the worst memory you have from Goli Otok?

That my friend was killed there, and no one knows how he was killed. When the new government came to Croatia in 1989 I openly asked for an investigation, and I did the same with the American Senate. Tito has never wanted to do that because he took the same murderous people into his politics.

My grandfather and uncle were killed by the Communists after the war, he said dully; and by then I'd seen the anguish that shimmered all through his wide pale body as brightly as the light shining on his glasses as he sat there with the names of so many dead HOS fighters behind him. —They confiscated all their property. My grandfather was a doctor and all his equipment was taken. My father was persecuted as a Catholic. My brother emigrated to Chicago.

Did you grow up poor?

We couldn't really prosper because we were persecuted. Tudjman had me put in

prison three years ago and I was only released after assistance from the Senate. They started saying that I was a fascist in order to justify my being put into jail. It bothers Tudjman that I still speak the truth and that people want to listen.

What leader do you model yourself after?

Someone who's very consistent in his beliefs. Someone who doesn't use people just to pragmatically stay in power. I want to be like anyone who has moral principles, anyone who doesn't separate political beliefs from his principles.

Who has done that best?

A number of people, from Roosevelt to Gandhi.

When do you think that violence is justified?

He put his hand under his chin. Then he clasped his hands.

It's the last means, he said, and it's just when it's necessary to defend dignity at the personal and the national level. There exists aggression and there exists defense against aggression. When rights and justice are destroyed, then this means must be used.

So would violence be justified against Greater Serbia?

The violence in itself, the aggression of Greater Serbia, leads to the destruction of people. The idea of Greater Serbia leads to the negation of people. If the world does not deploy force against that aggression, it stands on the side of that aggression.

Is HOS continuing the struggle now?

They're in BiH⁷ under the unified command of the United Army, he said in that same bland and listless voice. Perhaps it was his political erasure that had crushed his affect. Perhaps he was always that way.

Did Tudjman's government ever make use of HOS?

They banned HOS!

That sounds like a big mistake, I said, sorry for him.

That was a big mistake, because the military court freed me since HOS was fighting on the front line. You see, Tudjman had a secret agenda with Milosevic, and that was why HOS bothered him. You know, HOS was even at Vukovar. Tudjman wanted to give Vukovar away. HOS fought there for three months, and today Vukovar is in the hands of Serbia. We had severe battles with those Arkan people. But two thousand defenders of Vukovar, including both HOS and locals, forced fifteen thousand of the Chetniks out, the ones who served under Arkan and Seselj. There was also the regular Yugoslav army that we were fighting... We also didn't have arms... And today, as I said Vukovar is held by Serbs...

I thought that Mr. Paraga might have been crying. And I thought of Vineta, who also cried when she remembered Vukovar.

Are you the military commander of HOS? I asked him.

By far my greatest influence is political, he said modestly.

How many people are in your party now and how many are in HOS?

It's difficult to say, he replied with the same weary flatness. The active army is

in BiH. The majority have been demobilized. Tadjman kicked them out because they were good fighters...

And suddenly he like Vineta seemed so lonely; and I wondered whether it was entirely Tadjman's machinations or whether people were just getting tired of being extremists after all the bestial cruelties of this war. But then it was time to go and the HOS veteran slapped my shoulder gently and whispered: *Bog*, which means: Go with God; and looking into his serenely confident and determined fighter's face I knew that the extremists would be strong enough to fight on and on and on.

MOSTAR, REPUBLIC OF BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA CASUALTIES

Now, I need to tell you that the reason I chose to return to Bosnia this time was that in Sarajevo there had been a Studenski Dom right on the front line where a number of students from all over ex-Yugoslavia and abroad were trapped by the war; I had stayed with them for several days and written about them and worried about them and never forgotten them. There was also a woman in downtown Sarajevo whose terror and hopelessness had long disturbed my sleep; Vineta called her my Muslim bitch. I could not write any of these people or telephone them. I brooded over them sometimes, I tried without success to get magazines to send me back there, and finally I sought to forget these souls I could do nothing for. One day I received a letter from my friend Abdel at the Studenski Dom. The letter was dated November and had taken half a year to arrive, courtesy of some church relief group. The letter said in part:

Dear Bill,

I hope so that you can remember who I am. I met you at the beginning of September 1992... I am writing this letter because I want to hear voices from normal world without war pictures. I send one letter to you in the spring of 1993, but it seems that you didn't get it (post mistake or mail mistake)... I hope so that your family is a good, that your health is right, and I want you to have great successes in your business. I need your help because I have a great problem. Two girls from Gorazde living with me at last 15 months. One of them is my girlfriend. Our economy situation is bad. We haven't enough food, and life in Sarajevo is so expensive, and we need some money. Our families cannot help us because they are in worse situation than we in occupied towns Gorazde and Mostar. My mother and sister tries to come to Sarajevo because they cannot survive in Mostar. I didn't write about this is last letter, because I was a shame, but now I have to. If you can send some money and food you may to do it using... American journalists who come to Sarajevo...

March 24, 1994

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—Extensions of Remarks

E569

honored this coming Saturday night, March 26th, by the Hudson County Association for Brain Injured Children. Former State Senator Thomas F. Cowan, of Jersey City, is the honoree at this year's dinner.

Senator Cowan ably represented parts of Bergen and Hudson Counties from the day of his election to the Assembly in 1977, which he served three terms until his election to the State Senate in 1983. In his three Senate terms, Tom established a reputation as an experienced legislator, and a dependable servant of the people of the 32d District.

A Jersey City native, Tom attended St. Paul's School in his hometown, and went on to the Holy Family Academy in Bayonne. During the conclusion of World War II, he served in the Army from July 1945 to April 1946, and later returned to service from May 1952 to April 1954 during the Korean conflict. At the conclusion of his service, he had attained the rank of sergeant. Tom later continued his education locally, attending Seton Hall University, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Studies and Political Science in 1962.

Tom serves as the business representative of Local 825 of the International Union of Operating Engineers, and is chairman of the Political Action and Education Committee of Local 825. He is also a trustee of the Local's Pension and Welfare Funds, and a member of the National Foundation of Health, Welfare and Pension Funds. As a delegate to both the New Jersey State AFL-CIO and the New Jersey State Building Trades conventions, Tom has demonstrated outstanding leadership on behalf of the union's membership.

A member of the Holy Name Society of St. Aedans Church, Tom's dedication to his family and his community has never wavered. I commend Mr. Cowan's record of public service to my colleagues, and ask them to join me in recognizing his accomplishments as he accepts his honors this Saturday night.

CROATIAN LEADERS SHOW SUPPORT FOR DOBROSLAV PARAGA AS LEGAL PRESIDENT OF THE CROATIAN PARTY OF RIGHTS

HON. JAMES A. TRAFICANT, JR.

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 24, 1994

Mr. TRAFICANT. Mr. Speaker, I rise to take this opportunity to share a letter with my colleagues on behalf of Dobroslav Paraga, an opposition leader in the Croatian Parliament who was democratically elected the President of the Croatian Party of Rights. Attempts by the Tudjman government to deprive him of his elected right to function in this capacity have resulted in the following letter of protest.

Let us not forget how far Croatia has yet to come in granting democratic rights to its own citizens. The United States can be of great assistance in supporting progress in this area in its negotiations with the Croatian Government.

At this point, I wish to include the text of the letter which follows:

LETTER OF SUPPORT TO THE CROATIAN PARTY OF RIGHTS AND ITS LEGAL PRESIDENT, DOBROSLAV PARAGA

I condemn the unconstitutional and unlawful decision by the Ministry of Administra-

tion of the Republic of Croatia which has named persons it authorizes to represent the Croatian Party of Rights. Such a decision is in violation of the law on political parties in Croatia as well as the statutes of the Croatian Party of Rights.

In the interest of democracy and parliamentarism in Croatia I ask that the authorities make correct application of laws governing this case. I think this is extremely unethical that the Croatian Government and its ministers interfere in the work of political parties such as they have done with the Croatian Party of Rights. I also think it is unethical that the courts, whose main function is to protect civil rights, have ignored the appeals of those whose civil rights have been violated.

With this letter I am expressing my concern for the state of democracy in Croatia, as well as my support for the legal and legitimate representatives of the Croatian Party of Rights in their struggle for democracy, and a State based on law and unobstructed political party activity. These are the rights of all citizens regardless of their political affiliation.

I agree that this letter with my signature may be made public.

The following is a list of the signatories to the above letter:

1. Miro Trivnjo, President of Soros Foundation, Vice-President of Croatian Helsinki Committee, Representative of Croatian Parliament.
2. Danjel Ivin, Member of Presidency of Croatian Helsinki Committee
3. Vjekoslav Vidovic, retired President of Supreme Court of Croatia
4. Dragutina Lesar, President of Association of Independent Unions of Croatia
5. Boris Kunat, President of Zagreb Chapter of Association of Independent Unions of Croatia
6. Dr. Samsa Tankovic, President of Party for Democratic Action in Croatia
7. Hans Peter Rullmann, Publisher of "Hrvatska Domovina" newspaper, President of German-Croatian Society
8. Dr. Marko Veselica, President of Croatian Christian Democratic Union
9. Vladimir Jakic, Head Secretary of Croatian Helsinki Committee
10. Zek Arandjic, Professor at Zagreb University, President of Marhamet for Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina
11. Dr. Ivo Banac, Professor at Yale University
12. Dr. Ivo Goldstein, Professor at Zagreb University
13. Ivan Zvonimir Cizak, President of Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights
14. Dr. Juraj Plenkovic, Professor at Zagreb University
15. Dr. Stoboden Leng, Croatian Ambassador for Human Rights and Professor at Zagreb University
16. Slavko Goldstein, Editor of "Novi Liber" magazine

TRIBUTE TO MAJ. GEN. THOMAS M. MONTGOMERY

HON. ANDREW JACOBS, JR.

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 24, 1994

Mr. JACOBS. Mr. Speaker, during World War II the name, General Montgomery was enormously famous and just a bit controversial.

Now in this year of 1994, there is another General Montgomery, Maj. Gen. Thomas M. Montgomery of the U.S. Army. There is not-

ing controversial about this General Montgomery. He is an authentic American hero with a distinguished and long standing record of noble service to our Nation.

On March 31st the United States ends its military involvement in Somalia. General Montgomery has been the Commanding Officer of all U.S. forces in Somalia, and now it's home for him.

General Montgomery served longer than any other U.S. service member in Somalia, and he is among the last 20,000 to leave that unhappy land.

General Montgomery also served as Deputy Commander of the U.N. Operation in Somalia, an operation that involved 30,000 people from 29 nations. He completed that assignment on February 7, 1994.

Like all great commanders, General Montgomery has been rather modest about his own towering achievements, preferring to heap praise on the soldiers, sailors, air personnel and marines of the United States. These people endured enormous hardships, were exposed to danger and brought honor to our Defense Department. But so did Gen. Tom Montgomery, the first American general officer to don the blue beret of the United Nations.

Not the least of the General's accomplishments is to have been born a Hoosier, a graduate of Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis, later earning a bachelor's degree in Slavic languages, including Russian, as well as in literature at Indiana University where he completed his Reserve officer's training and was commissioned a Lieutenant by the Army.

Serving the Army as an armor officer, specializing in tanks, General Montgomery spent a total of 10 years on the Plains of Europe, earning his professional spurs while helping to protect West Germany's borders from the threat of the Communist forces which, at the time, outnumbered his own 10 to 1.

General Montgomery also served two separate 1 year tours with the 11th Armored Black Horse Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam.

Later he served as the Deputy Commander of the 8th Infantry Division. And he has been an excellent instructor in the classrooms of outstanding military schools in the United States, including the famous War College.

His awards are a litany of valor and devotion to duty. He has earned the Defense Distinguished Service Medal and two Legions of Merit. He has also earned, I think, more significantly been awarded both the Silver and Bronze Stars with the V attachment symbolizing valor in Southeast Asia. The German Government awarded General Montgomery the Federal Republic of Germany's Honor Cross in Silver.

Thus he was well suited to make history in Somalia. And he has done just that with discipline, skill and honor.

As I have said many times and in many places, true patriotism is not a shouting match. It is an abiding thing, calm and steady on stormy seas as well as the safety of the harbor. And General Montgomery reflects that ideal. Not flashy, but calm, quiet and dignified. He is the personification of modest but awe some valor.

The poet Homer wrote, "In a just world there would be no need for valor." But this is not a just world. And as long as it is not, pray, God that America may always have the like of Gen. Thomas M. Montgomery.

"The American Senate passed a resolution in my favor."

When I saw this letter my sadness and anger and need to be of service burst out afresh; and this time my wish to return to Bosnia was granted. I had a friend from my high school days, Francis Tomasic, whose father had been Croatian-born and who had passed some time in Zagreb learning his ancestral language. Francis had been my translator in Zagreb the last time I went there, but he had chosen not to go to Sarajevo with me because it was too dangerous. After the "Washington Agreement" of early 1994, travel to that city became much safer. Where I really needed him was in the Serbian Republic of Krajina, because he could speak Serbo-Croatian and had an American passport, which combination of abilities would be most helpful in crossing from the Croatian to the Serbian side. Francis, however, wanted very much to visit Sarajevo. I think he felt that he had let me down in not accompanying me there before, which was not the case, and he also had a strong curiosity about Sarajevo, which he had seen years before the war. He had a Serbian friend whose sister had been caught there by the siege; there'd been no news of her since, and Francis had promised the Serb that he would do his best to find her and to help her if she were still alive.

At that time there was a land route from Split to Sarajevo which had been discovered by Reuters. It was a way of remaining entirely within Croatian and Muslim territory, although at several places it did run within sight of the Serbian lines. Journalists had driven it frequently without incident. Having been bumped twice from the U.N. flight, Francis and I rented a car in Split, sharing driving and expenses with a third American, Will Brinton. For reasons which it's now simpler to forget, we took the wrong road from Mostar.

There was a final HVO checkpoint perhaps ten minutes out of that half-ruined city where Croatian soldiers stood and slouched, pistols in their belts, chewing nothing and gazing across the river at the Muslim side. One of them was reading a pornographic magazine. Francis spoke with them and told us they'd said that the Muslim checkpoint was about 300 meters ahead, more or less; they weren't sure because (as the soldier put it, spreading his hands) they weren't on the best of terms with the Muslims. A minute or two farther down that dirt road, which followed the river, we met the last people my friends would ever speak with, two girls walking in their shifts with baskets of yellow roses. We stopped and flirted and Francis asked directions one more time and they giggled and gave us each a rose. Then we got back into the car. It was about one-o'clock. Will was driving. Francis was in the front passenger seat, happy and excited, and I was behind him. I had my bulletproof vest on, with the yellow rose that the girls had given me snuggled down across the front trauma plate with the two velcro straps. Will had refused to bring his vest from Split at all, and Francis's cheap flak jacket, which still might possibly have saved his life, lay at his feet. Will's life could not have been saved. I remember passing a bridge which had been blown up right in the middle, and then we came to a dam and Will turned onto it. I do not recall noticing whether this decision was

Will's or Francis's; I never knew exactly what the girls told Francis; inertial with sleep I lolled in the back seat, and so through default I also bear some responsibility; but none of that matters anymore.

What I do remember is the Peugeot traveling rapidly across the top of the dam, which was a smooth free feeling like that of running across a crust of snow in one's socks, and Will and Francis were bantering idly and morbidly as seemed to be the style of journalists in Bosnia; Francis wondered if we would live if the dam collapsed under us, and Will said that with all the concrete that would be flying around he didn't think so. —It would be interesting, though, said Francis. —Pretty scary, said Will. —Then the first explosion smashed through the windshield. My friend Adnan once told me that the average response time of a civilian to an unexpected attack is close to one minute, while a soldier or a person living in a war zone can react within a second. Maybe this is true. I no longer remember whether the second explosion came just before or just after Francis's two screams, short and shrill and horrible with what I took at that moment to be only panic. Now I understood that the war had finally caught up with us. Seeing Will's bald head slumped forward with bright blood on it and spatters of dark blood on the ceiling and sun visor, seeing two holes like bullet holes in the windshield—all this now in less than half a second—I flung myself down on the floor, certain that a sniper had just killed Will and that Francis had fainted. There had been only two reports, and I saw two holes in the windshield, both on Will's side, and of course I could not believe that my friend of almost twenty years was dead. Just then I noticed that the car was motionless, and probably had been for some seconds. I shouted to Will to drive on, but of course he did not answer. Hunched down behind Francis's seat with sweat scuttering inside my heavy vest, I saw how Francis's wide neck was sideways; his head had fallen forward toward Will's. I called to him twice, but he too would never speak again. At that time, fortunately for my nerves, I persisted in my denial of the obvious. I was not yet afraid. It was very hot and bright and cloudless, and for a long time I watched a small white bird on the right-hand guardrail of the dam, fluttering and pecking and preening. There was nothing to do but lie as still as I could for as long as I could, to avoid the sniper's third bullet. He must be somewhere on the Utah-like hill ahead on the Muslim side. Because the bullets had not exited from Will and Francis's bodies, I deduced that they were low caliber or else had been fired from some distance. The noises had been just like gunshots, and there was a smell like the smell at a rifle range, except that it had perhaps more of a scorched quality than gunpowder usually did. The smell lingered and thickened in the car, even though the windows were down. Now I heard soldiers shouting something from the Muslim side, and then there was laughter, not far away at all, and that was when I felt a ball of terror in my stomach. I imagined them as being some irregular unit that murdered and pillaged. They had shot Will very accurately, and possibly had hit Francis as well (the assignation of any living quality to his silence was getting steadily less credi-

ble), so presumably they would want to shoot me, too. More laughter, deep, loud and relaxed. I decided that I would wait until darkness, after which I could creep back across the dam to the HVO side, hide in the forest until morning, and then ask some passerby to help me return to Mostar. Francis was certainly out cold. I reasoned that if I woke him up he would panic again, and then the sniper would be bound to see his thrashings and screams. Keeping as low as I could, I reached around the seat to touch him, and his flesh was warm. It was, after all, very hot in the car, and it had only been five minutes. Best to let him sleep. This was easier to decide on account of the horror of Will's dying. I hope that he was not conscious enough to suffer; he never once lifted his bloody head, but now he began to vomit slowly in long moans, the same sort of moans that I have heard a walrus make when it is shot. They say that dying people gurgle, but it was not exactly that. He made perhaps three of these noises, and then it was over. Perhaps this last reflex had been an attempt by his poor body to rid itself of some foreign evil, it knew not what—nor would it have mattered if it had known, since nobody except tricksters can vomit death out again. Now I was alone. I wanted very much to peer over the top of Francis's seat to find if the windshield there were intact, which would strengthen my hope for his life, but that would be helping the sniper. So I lay there sweating with my jackknifed legs beginning to cramp, while over and over inside my skull echoed Francis's two screams. He was dead. I knew that. His screams must have expressed pain as well as terror. But his passing was surely speedy; the pair of screams had been so brief and staccato and closely spaced; and after that he'd never stirred again. Later, when I pulled them both out of the car, I saw that Francis had a small wound right over his heart; Will, on the other hand, had been hit where his head joined the neck.

Fifteen minutes had passed, and my legs were going numb. I wondered how I could last the seven or eight hours until darkness, but I knew that I would have to. Then I heard that deep and callous laughter again, and it sounded closer. For a moment I lost hope and believed that the sniper and his friends would come for me soon, that I would be merely the last of us three to die, that I would die after waiting and fearing, like a deep sea fish plucked from the livewell of a boat hours after it had been caught. I was very thirsty now, but could not reach my canteen without revealing myself. One of Will's oranges, however, had rolled onto the seat. Will had been very fond of oranges. He'd bought a couple of kilos of them in Split. I bit the orange open and sucked the sweet fresh juice out and then tried to sleep. It was half past one. Then there came those rumbling shouting voices from the Muslim hill again, much louder and closer, and my blood, as the saying goes, ran cold.

I knew that all three sides in what had been Yugoslavia respected a "real man." I decided that that was how I'd play it. When the irregulars strolled into sight, their Kalashnikovs nonchalantly pointed down, I summoned up my Serbo-Croatian, smiled, and wished them a good afternoon.

The effect was impressive. So many lethal erections! I looked into all those gun-muzzles and kept smiling and waited.

How many in the car? a man shouted.

Two dead and one maybe about to die, I told him; he liked that.

Croatian?

American.

American! Oh, shit.

The Kalashnikovs wilted again, and they came and helped me out.

Mussulman? I said.

Da.

Salaam alaykum.

They laughed and helped me out of the car. They began explaining to me that it had been mines. I agreed, not believing it for a second, and went them one better by suggesting that it must have been *Croatian* mines. They liked that, I could see. They stood around me solicitously as I opened the front passenger door and regarded my friends.

Dead? I asked the Muslims.

Dead, they said solemnly.

Even now I didn't want to believe them. I held Francis's hand, raised his arm, and let it go; it fell back. I unfastened his seatbelt and dragged him out and laid him gently on his back looking up at the sun. His eyes were glazed; he was finished. Will was even more obviously done for. I took him under the armpits and eased him out, too.

My friends, I said to the Muslims with a broad smile. Dead.

Shock, one man whispered to another, tapping his forehead.

I asked them if I could photograph my friends' bodies, and they hesitated. I said that it was for my friends' mothers, and then they shrugged and agreed. I was very careful not to photograph of any of the Muslims, because then they might still decide that it was better to shoot me.

Eat, I said hospitably, offering them an armload of Will's oranges.

They shook their heads.

They were looking at Will's cameras, nice new ones with long lenses, so I took those out and gave them away. They became very happy. One soldier reached in and took Francis's flak jacket. Understanding what would happen if I didn't act quickly, I reached into my friends' pockets and belly-pouches for their money and documents. Soon I had quite a wad, gooey with chocolate and vomit and blood. I offered these to the Muslims, but they politely shook their heads. They were trying to be kind; they wouldn't take anything until I'd left. Will had quite a bit of small currency—some twenty-five Croatian dinar notes (each worth slightly less than half a cent), and some hundreds, all of them particularly badly stained, so I took them and let them flutter down into the river one by one.

Shock, the Muslims said.

Later some Spanish UNPROFOR soldiers came and took me to their base at Drasevo, where I was treated with immense kindness. The next morning they drove me to SPABAT⁵⁸ headquarters in Medjugorje.

AN ACADEMIC QUESTION

The Spaniards assured me that my friends had been killed by a PROM-1 antipersonnel mine, and they may have been right. When I returned to Mostar two days later with the American consul to identify and bring back my friends' bodies, a Muslim police official laid out a diagram. It had been three mines connected by a wire. The first mine made Will lose control of the car and guided him into the second mine, which killed him, and then the third mine killed Francis. So far, so good. At the risk of being a pest, here is why I still have my doubts.

First of all, I remember hearing only two explosions, not three. Secondly, the noises were like gunshots, and what I saw on my friends' bodies resembled small-caliber gunshot wounds. Granted, I do not know my PROM-1 mines; I have never knowingly seen one. But other mine victims I have seen lose eyes and legs. One of my friends—I don't remember now which one—had a macerated arm, but this could have been caused by something else. Francis's chest wound and Will's head wound were small, distinct and clean. Third of all, I remember seeing only two bullet-like holes in the windshield. The glass around them was spidered and crazed, but this is how glass looks when you shoot it. One would think that there'd be a shock-wave of some sort from a mine which would have taken more of the windshield out and done more damage to me; but, again, I am not a connoisseur of mines.

Now we get to the part that I really don't enjoy talking about. When I identified the bodies in Mostar, I saw holes in them that I hadn't noticed before. There was one large wound in particular in Francis's left temple which I am sure I would have seen before. Unfortunately, in the photograph I took of his body, his head is canted in such a way as to hide that area. Similarly, I don't recall the car as being exceptionally damaged, but photos of it which the rental company later thrust in my face showed extensive riddlings and smashings.

In short, one of two things happened. Either my two friends were killed by snipers who mistook them for Croats, repented of their error enough to let me go, and then set off a mine to cover their traces, or else—probably more likely—I was, as they said, in shock, and failed to see a number of obvious things. I did have perhaps a dozen tiny, painless wounds which resembled pimples along my left arm, the left side of my chest, and just under my right eye. (There were also some abrasions to the fabric of my bulletproof vest, as if a number of particles had bounced off the trauma plate.) Very probably these were caused by shrapnel from a mine. They also could have been little bits of glass from the windshield. A doctor probed

several of these places in my hand with a needle, but found nothing.

Call it a mine. Call it snipers. In any event, the laughter of the men who arranged it, and the fact that they waited an hour for us to die, satisfy me that it was not, as others put it when they offered me their condolences, an "accident," but a simple case of murder. Never mind. Let's call it a mine.³⁹

SPABAT H.Q., MEDJUGORJE

Coughing and chatting Spaniards in blue helmets and camouflage uniforms strolled between sandbagged bungalows while I sat waiting for the phone to ring so that I'd know when the hearse would be coming from Split. First there was only one major and the fan of a darkened computer just around the corner from the shelves of blue helmets and camo flak jackets; then came the slim and pretty interpreter who wrested back her dark hair and stood speaking Serbo-Croatian on the telephone; next came the stern major who'd yesterday reproached my friends for their stupidity, which I thought might have been right or wrong but was certainly uncalled for; he reminded me of the police chief in Beograd who'd said he couldn't answer a single question or do anything except offer me his hospitality; the major, another by-the-book fellow, had been on duty all day and night, and would not be able to sleep until tonight; he asked me if I had called my embassy last night and I said I hadn't, because the embassy was going to call me. I felt conspicuously useless. Probably I didn't need to be there at all, but seeing me wait there for a few hours more might make somebody do something a little faster so that it could all be over; that seemed like the best I could do for Francis's family. (From what Will had told me, he hadn't much in the way of family, just an uncle or two.) Over the three rows of four maps married into a giant rectangle by yellowing tape it said!!! OPCODES LAS COORDENADAS!!! The captain who'd congratulated me on being the sole survivor of "the incident" now came in and put on a cassette, something sweet and folksy and Spanish and croonish. I had never thought that my friends' death was of importance to anyone but themselves, me, and those who'd known them; and the soldiers who tramped in and out, snipping papers with scissors, packing computers into boxes and joking, made me feel almost guilty about the whole thing, as if since people were killed in Bosnia every day our business had gone on too long. I agreed with that; I wanted it to be concluded, too. The computer operator sat down pertly, her head crooked as closely as a small boy's, and her dark eyes made the screen beep and fill with garish colors. One of my many embarrassments was that Francis and Will's blood had dried on the knees of my bluejeans and I couldn't get it off. I'd left my other pair of pants in Zagreb to save space in my backpack, which was loaded with food to eat and give away in Sarajevo. So I tried to cross my knees when I could, and spread my fingers over the uppermost leg. Whenever I walked through the SPABAT compound, though, the soldiers would gaze at my knees, and there

wasn't much I could do about it. But this unpleasantness was not intense. Mainly I was indifferent to things.

I went out, took off my visitor badge, and passed through the main gate. They had invited me to eat with them, but I felt shy. (Perhaps it was a little like the time that Vineta was fighting for so many days in her boots at Vukovar that they had to cut her socks off her bloody feet and she wanted to cry but she wouldn't, because she didn't want anybody to think she wasn't brave.) The two girls at the restaurant down the street from UNPROFOR's tanks poking out over the vineyards told me that HOS was very good. I made a note to tell Vineta and Mr. Paraga if I ever saw either of them again. One of the girls was engaged to somebody from SPABAT whose snapshot showed him in front of a statue of the Virgin with his hands in his jacket pockets. While one girl cooked my steak, the other whispered and giggled and confided with her through the hatchway. I opened my mouth to say something amusing and the words came out: My friends are dead. —They shrank back. I laughed and then had a spasm of crying. Something exploded inside my brain. Once again I heard Francis's screams and then Vineta saying to me so lovingly and protectively: Go home and write the truth about us. I know you won't be a liar like the others. And if anyone dares to hurt a hair of your head, I'll personally save up all my money, come to L.A. and kill every one of those fucking Croat bastards!

EAST MOSTAR

They pried the nails off the two coffins and I saw then what I'd continued to disbelieve: first, that Francis was truly dead, and second, that it really had been mines—why, there were all kinds of holes in my friends that I'd missed!

That's Will, I said. Yep, that's Fran. Poor Fran.

I wanted to touch his hand again, but I couldn't bear how everyone was looking at me. I went out into the silent streets of bulletpocked cars and kids shooting pebbles through their silver blowguns which had once been car antennae; there were kids all around with their hands on their knees and old people and young people waiting to see the coffins come out; and kids saying to relief workers: Please give me one for my sister, I have one sister! —Soldiers leaned against cars. I gazed at shell holes and sandbags and missing roofs. A man in camo pants swung by on his crutches, and the American consul stood with his hands behind his back and spoke into the lens of the video camera and I caught the words: ... strayed into a mine...

Who killed your friends? asked a tall pimply girl who'd said she hated me.

I don't know, I said diplomatically.

Her boyfriend leered at me. —I know, he said.

Oh, is that right? I said wearily. Who did it?

The Croats. They wanted you to die. They told you at the checkpoint to go by this dam, and then they went running so that the mine would not kill them.

How do you know that?

He knows everything, the girl said proudly.

I'm from that part of town, he said.

That's nice, I said. Did you know that one of my friends was half-Croatian?

Croatian! they exclaimed in disgust.

Yes.

Oh, the boy said. Then *we* killed your friends. We killed them, and we were so happy when they were dead.

I stood there awhile and still the coffins had not come out and after a long time a woman came walking past with a tiny girl. The mother pointed me out. The child came running shyly to me, holding out a wilted red rose. —*Puna bvala*, I said. Thank you very much. —I laid it straight up over the trauma plate of my bulletproof vest and velcro'd it into place, and then I remembered the yellow roses that the Croatian girls had given each of us and my eyes burned and I choked.

Why did you come here? a little Muslim boy whispered.

To see my dead friends.

I know, he said. I hate it. I hate it when they die.

They shouldered my friends out into the hearse at last, and he said: I hate that smell.

NATURAL HISTORY

The forensic man wants to know why your passport is green when the other two passports are blue, said the embassy translator.

Tell him that when Americans die their passports turn blue, I said, and the consul frowned a little...

He wants to know why Mr. Tomasic thought you should turn onto the dam, said the translator.

Tell him to ask Mr. Tomasic, I said.

After that they left me alone. I felt sleepy all the time. I could not listen much to others. I wanted to lie down and be alone as much as I could. In Split the doctor clapped me gently on the back and said: *Bog*.⁶⁰

And yet my perceptions and sensations became more intense. I remembered lying in a half-crouch in that back of that Peugeot waiting for the snipers, and there'd been that small white bird on the right-hand guardrail of the dam, so busy and fearless. And every now and then the car would creak slightly, I still don't know why. And I remembered the smell of Will's oranges in the back seat, and the astonishing thickness of Francis's neck as he lay with his head against Will's back. And I remember how cloudless the sky was. Now in Split's crowded narrow marble streets I saw the sun on the hair of a passing brunette, and the brightness of a middle-aged man's shoulder. I could have counted every bubble in the foam of my beer if I'd

wanted to, but I didn't want to.

The cab driver said: Serbs are perfectly free here. There are so many of them in Split.

Do you have any Serbian friends?

No, but I *know* them. It's their church that says the bad things about us.

Which things?

I don't know, he said. You'd have to be in their secret department and that's very difficult.

At the edge of the sea a fortyish woman with rich black hair sat gazing at tiny snapshots of a girl, probably her daughter, and wiping her eyes. Her lips moved as if in prayer.

And I kept wondering if Francis might in fact be alive. I knew this in myself from other deaths. I had needed to see him in Mostar to be convinced, and that conviction was soon superseded by another sprout of unsound hope which grew up between the rubblestones of fact; I knew that if I went to the pathology institute and they let me see him again I would believe again, but hours later I'd be speculating: What if in fact he were in a deep coma, his metabolism slowed so much that he'd survived his terrible wounds? This was no different from the feeling I'd had before in the car when I'd convinced myself that he'd just fainted.

PRIMITIVES

The night before he died, Francis and I had an argument. Vineta had used her connections, as I've said, to grant me an interview with Ms. Biljana Plavsic, Vice President of the Bosnian Serbs (and in Split, where you can see the Adriatic so blue through Diocletian's worn square arches, a Croatian widow spread her hands and said to me that of *course* Ms. Plavsic was a war criminal;⁶¹ and in Posusje, just inside Hercegovina, some HVO guys flung up their wrists at the mention of Ms. Plavsic and the Bosnian Serb President, Mr. Karadzic, saying: Oh, they're the worst. They massacre, they rape and torture children everywhere. They have death camps. They're liars. They brought blood to this town!). I was telling Francis what she had said. The interview took place in what is called "an imposing villa." Vineta took me past the sentry, who checked my passport and UNPROFOR card, to the waiting room in front of the office, to the waiting room which had once been a living room, and then up the carpeted stairs (the wooden balustrade so brightly polished). Ms. Plavsic was hale and quiet and grandmotherly, a pencil always in her wrinkled hand. She had pretty teeth. Behind her desk hung a calendar with the double-headed Serbian eagle. I asked whether if her side won she would permit people from the other two groups to live in the Republik Bosnia Srbska, and she said:

I think it is necessary to have all three sides separate. It's very difficult to say how long the remembrance of 1991 and so on will last. It is much better to make

the separation, not only for Serbs, but also for them. You can sign I don't know what kind of agreement, but after this cruelty you cannot guarantee that you can control everyone. You cannot control for example a man whose whole family was killed in this war. I know in this territory it's possible to find a lot of mixed Muslims and Croats. If it's a mixed marriage, it's OK. I know it's very painful for people, very painful. The main thing is that the war needs to stop. But you cannot talk about that when the front line is always active. You know there was a strong Muslim offensive since one month. On Orthodox holidays we are always afraid what is going on, Easter and so on...

I gave Francis the gist of this and said that perhaps she was right; I honestly didn't know.

I understand what you're trying to do, he said. You want to grant everyone the status of a human being. And it's commendable. But you always look too much on the dark side. You give these hate-mongers like Plavsic too much power. Most people don't think the way she does. Most people can live together.⁶² Serbs and Croats and Muslims have always lived together...

So you don't think there's even a grain of truth in what she says?

There's a grain of truth in what Hitler said! he shouted.

Well then, Fran, let me ask you something. If everybody can live together so well, why are they all fighting? Why do they all want their own homelands?

He was silent for a moment. Then he came back to the Serbs. Although he had Serbian friends, the Serbs were the aggressors in this war. The Serbs were the ones who wouldn't live and let live. That was what he said and always said; many others said it, too, and it might even have been true, but if it was true, if it explained why the Serbs in Krajina blamed the Croats and why Ms. Plavsic told me that the Muslims were more dangerous than the Croats, then why did the Muslims in East Mostar also blame the Croats and why did the Croats in West Mostar blame the Muslims? Francis would have answered, I think, that that didn't prove anything. (He was a very intelligent man. Vineta wouldn't have liked him or his arguments—but then she hadn't liked him as soon as I told her his Croatian last name.) The Serbs had started it, he would have insisted, and then the Muslims and the Croats had had a falling out. Maybe. It didn't matter anymore. All I'd seen on this trip was each side assassinating the reputation of the other two. I was sickened by it. I couldn't and wouldn't sort it out. And I remembered the previous night when Francis and I had rented a room in Split from a family who lived near the bus station, and they had a poster of Ante Pavelic on the wall. Historians have not said very many kind things about Pavelic, who organized the assassination of his king.⁶³ Following Hitler's "Operation Punishment," which crushed the Yugoslav government in 1941, the Italians appointed Pavelic to head the "Independent State of Croatia." Here is a typical assessment of his achievements: *It is estimated that the Ustasha murdered more than 350,000 Serbs⁶⁴ during the war. Although there were concentration camps*

*whose inmates rarely emerged alive, for the most part those killed were simply the inhabitants of a recalcitrant village. The Ustasha murdered most often by shooting, but more brutal methods were frequently employed. Deeply infected by the hatred of the interwar years, Pavelic and his cohorts developed a contagious mental illness that in turn produced a blood lust unequalled beyond the realm of the Nazi SS. The Italians were contemptuous of and eventually sickened by the behavior of their creation but were powerless to control it.*⁶⁵ Pavelic, incidentally, was an HSP leader, and he coined the slogan ZA DOM SPREMNI ("ready for the homeland"), which I saw on HOS posters in 1992 and again on my return in 1994. I had asked Dobroslav Paraga what happened when Pavelic came to power, and he stared at his papers and replied: The party was banned, as I said.

What about the people from the party itself?

Some people from HOS, including Mr. Pavelic, formed an organization in 1942, said Paraga. A large part of the population accepted that state as a way out of Greater Serbia. A smaller number joined the Communists and with the help of the Soviet Union provoked a civil war.

Oh, you mean the Partisans?

Da. Croatia was proclaimed fascist by the opponents of Hitler, and destroyed. In the following fifty years, Greater Serbia has dominated everything.

Who caused more problems, Hitler or the Serbs? I asked.

Croatia was not free at that time, he replied carefully. The Serbs had a guerrilla war, and the Serbs wanted to destroy the Croatian state.

Perhaps the best way for me to convey how Pavelic's likeness could still make Serbs feel, even half a century after these events, is for me to repeat a story Vineta told me about when she and some other soldiers were searching the house of an old Croat whose three sons were reported to have slit the throats of many Serbs. —And then I saw that black Ustasha flag and I got so scared! she said. They had a picture of Franjo Tudjman, and that was OK, although he's a silly asshole, because he's their legal representative, but next to his picture was a picture of Pavelic—you know, that Ustasha leader from World War II who killed so many Serbs.⁶⁶ And that black uniform. Well, I shat in my uniform. I really did. I had to change my uniform, I was so scared. —Vineta said the other soldiers almost killed the old man when they saw that. Her mouth was dry with fear and she went outside to pick some grapes from the old man's trellis, but she couldn't reach them, and one of her comrades gathered the grapes for her in his helmet. She'd just begun to eat them when they brought the old man out. They were his grapes, and she stopped, ashamed, but the other Serbs reassured her that they weren't his anymore; he was a dead man. In the end they spared him due to his age. They took him to the police chief, a Serb who'd known his family for many years, and the police chief said: How could you have brought your sons up to do such horrible things? We used to bring you a cake on your Easter and you used to bring us a cake for Orthodox Easter. —Then both men cried. After that they let the Croat go. That was Vineta's story.

So Francis and I sat under the picture of Pavelic and drank the homemade rakija of that HOS family, who told us what they wanted to do to the Muslims, and later we went for a walk and Francis said to me in the darkness: I don't think I've ever felt so hopeless about the war as I do now listening to these primitives.⁶⁷

And so now as we ascended the green-hilled mountains, flashing through small towns with here and there the word HOS written on a wall, I thought about reminding Francis of his own discouragement that previous night but it seemed cruel; he wanted to believe that all Yugoslavs could live together; and maybe they could; we crossed back into Hercegovina again when it was already night, Will beginning to tire a little at the wheel as we wound down an almost empty street, girls hitchhiking, a yellow light above a window in a white house, then trees and a blue bus; now suddenly many cars, smiling teenagers, a streetside cafe packed with sitting crowds, all quite prosperous and untouched by the ordnance of primitives but who knew what acid vapors of hatred fumed inside their minds? —In Croatia we have an occupation today by the state of Serbia, the HOS man in Imotsky had said, homemade wine trembling in the glass, his dark eyes glittering and moving. He was speaking from experience (he had lost everything, had no place even to sleep anymore). He said: When the knife comes in the night, you have to go. Otherwise, you will be burned along with your house. —That was one of the many times when I felt hopeless. But I wanted and still want Francis to be right. Late the next morning, when Will's and Francis's life had an hour left to run, the three of us were in West Mostar, having now passed the checkpoint whose sign said WAR ZONE, having passed the lady weeping over a fresh grave in the cemetery (so many new crosses there); and there were some Croatian girls giggling and locking themselves away from me inside the wreckage of an apartment building astoundingly hideously shelled and pocked and powdered because the cellar had once been the Muslim command center; laundry was hanging out to dry even there, and outside in the hot sun an old Muslim man in giant heavy sunglasses stood beside a stocky young Croat man and a "mixed" woman, and the old man said: In my building there are more than a hundred people from all nations.

Did the three of you have problems during the fighting? I said, trying to put it as tactfully as I could.

None.

So who was shooting? I said.

Primitives, said the woman, and the Croat shrugged and said: Balkans. Politics imposed these differences across our people.

So that was nice, and maybe he was right, and maybe Francis was right. Will was off photographing some destroyed church; in about two hours that camera of his was going to belong to a Muslim soldier... Big and little ants crawled down the wall with its painted Croatian checkerboard and its red HVO and its red HOS and its scrawled DEMONS and LITTLE FURIA and MAD SKINZ and across the street some soldiers walked past a wall of sandbags. —I sat thinking about all this at SPA-

BAT HQ at Medjugorje, where the soil is almost tomato-red and there seems to be more vineyards than graves—no doubt because during World War II, when Pavelic's Ustasha were dumping wagonloads of women and children into deep ravines, they did not have time to set up markers.

LIRIJA

Medjugorje reminds me not only of the HVO soldier I met there who'd been a POW in East Mostar (he said that the Muslims would take your blood to use in transfusions for their wounded no matter how sick or weak you were; he also said that the Muslims had forced the Croatian prisoners to fill sandbags even in the face of Croatian shelling from across the river; he'd seen one of his comrades get killed that way) but also of my friend Lirija. Lirija was the sister of a woman whom Francis had once loved. She had known Francis for almost as many years as I had. I will never forget how the night before I left for Sarajevo in 1992 Lirija prayed so passionately for God to spare my life. Perhaps it was her prayer that saved me; who knows? Two days after I took that U.N. flight the plane was shot down and all killed, including an Italian journalist; coming in from the airport a sniper's bullet from a Serbian position missed my ankle by literally an inch; a week later a shell exploded near me in the street but almost all the shrapnel was caught by the grass; I got only a tiny piece in my hand; that same night a burst of fire from a Muslim position went through the wall just over my head. This time when I returned from Mostar, her brother Adnan, my friend and Francis's friend, at first very stern and short with me on account of Francis's death,⁶⁸ finally accepted that it had not been my fault and smiled a little and said: I think you will never die. Bullets and mines cannot kill you! and I thought of Lirija's prayers. Lirija came to see me when I was lying down in that apartment with the color print of the Virgin and the black and white family pictures in gold frames, trying not to hear Francis's screams. She'd come to learn exactly how he died, and then to pray for me. She had been to Medjugorje on many occasions, the first time, appropriately enough, in the summer of Tito's death when Lirija, aged nineteen, turned her back both on the Communist study group she had attended for two years and her father's Muslim heritage; because she had found Jesus—or, as she put it, Jesus found her. Earlier that same year (1981) some children had experienced a visitation of the Virgin Mary in Medjugorje, about which I heard very late on the last night before the "accident," when Francis and I had left Will sleeping and gone outside to talk more politics along the side of that moonlit empty road across which a breeze blew the not unpleasant fragrance of sheep, when there came a woman so skinny her hands were as hard and wrinkled as lumps of dried dung, and her forehead was wrinkled like a piece of warped old wood; and this woman said that I must give myself to God in love, to give all of myself if I wanted to see the Virgin, which I did, and that if it

were appropriate and necessary then God would show me everything. The woman also said: This war is not the fault of the Croats, the Muslims or the Serbs. Thirteen years before this war began, the Virgin Mary came to visit us for three days. She told us to turn the rosary three times a day and pray, but we would not, so God turned away from our sins and then the Muslims attacked us. —I would not be surprised to learn that Lirija had met this woman (whose head resembled a friendly skull in the darkness while her rosary beads shone white like vertebrae) when she drove from Zagreb to Medjugorje in 1981 in company with a priest. This would have been a considerably shorter journey than now, because Yugoslavia was still one country and Croats could shoot straight down through Krajina, not yet a Serbian Republic of frightened and frightening souls; in this regard another Croatian proverb (which by some coincidence may be a Serbian proverb, too) comes to mind: *When one is not angry the house is not small*. So Lirija and the priest would have reached Medjugorje (where on the last morning of my friends' life, a Sunday, the church bells had been ringing and an old woman was driving sheep across the road) in only a few hours, I don't know exactly how many; and when Lirija got there she set out to climb the little hill where the children had seen Mary. Of course the police were waiting in the bushes for people like her. They grabbed her and took her to the station, where the police chief, who was a good Marxist, expected her to admit that the children had lied. Lirija (whose name means "liberty") told him that she couldn't believe that. The police chief kept her there all day. Finally he let her go, promising to fine her heavily, which he never did. Lirija kept coming back. Nobody could stop her. That was Lirija. At Medjugorje she had had her own vision of the Virgin, and after that she could pray in tongues.

She asked me if I wanted her to pray with me and I said that I did. She took my hand in hers and began to ask Jesus to cast His blood down upon me and my family to preserve us from evil and sickness. She said that she could tell that my heart was filled with wounds, and she called upon Jesus to heal them. Then she began to speak in tongues.

I want to describe how it felt to have this woman holding my hand. Her hand was a huge slab of flesh which glowed with affection and strength. Her wrist rocked mine steadily and gently as she chanted in tongues those words which might have been Hebrew or Aramaic or nothing known on earth—ancient-sounding, full and heavy words like pebbles in a river. I remember the time I tried the drug called ecstasy with a woman I loved. It was as if all the nerve endings in my hands suddenly sprouted a million clitorises. Stroking this woman's body was a pure delight. I could not stop moving my hands up and down her body all night. To this day my sense of touch has retained some of that added joy. My appreciation of the tactile has been permanently enhanced. This laying-on of hands or whatever one calls what Lirija was now doing to me was a little like that, but not sexual; rather it was warm and rich and forgiving. Of course I felt guilty. Any survivor would. Francis had been

working for me, so maybe I was responsible for him; there were certainly those who thought so. Will was once a medic in Vietnam, it was true, but years ago and this had been his first time in Bosnia. So it went. But Lirija asked me to see Jesus and imagine that her hand now clasping mine and rocking it was His flesh which was also my Father's; and I did as she asked. Then she began to speak in tongues again. She did this for a long time. People came into the time from time to time, glanced at us, and quietly left. I felt close to tears but they didn't come. Later that day, for the first time since that day at the dam, I began to feel peace.

That night I found myself once more gazing out a bus's windows through the evening forests of full spring; I was returning to Serbia. The clouds formed an immense web of pink and blue; in that endlessness and freshness I was happy to be alive, and I put myself into the hands of God.

VINETA

The ride had taken me about eleven hours before. This time it took seventeen, and coming back it took nineteen. It was all due to red tape; there were four sets of officials who had to examine our passports. Crossing the Hungarian border a little before midnight, I saw how everyone suddenly sat up so straight and silent and submissive for the guards who issued from their niches in the tiled wall; the guards studied every page of every passport; they measured mine with a special gauge. So it was with the Croats who permitted us to go and the Hungarians who allowed us to come. And then at a quarter to one the two buses met in the night; the Croatian bus I'd ridden on went back to Zagreb, and the Serbian bus was now ready to return to Beograd. It seemed so weird and furtive and shameful. We waited at the Serbian border for six or seven hours, and finally they let us through. It was now almost summer on the monotonously rich plains of Vojvodina which went endlessly onward, so dreary and bright; but high summer had already come to Beograd, and I got off the bus in a glow of joy. (A woman in a red coat stood holding a bag and peering through the panes of Beogradski Izlora at a display of lamps and plates; a man hurried, buttoning his coat; most people moved more evenly and steadily, passing through the squares in ones and twos; a few dirty, most clean; I would have thought that they had some errand to accomplish and perhaps they did but Branka was right; there were too many of them; there were not enough jobs. The war and the embargo had hurt them there. But it was not a poor city. Empty cafe tables still crouched under the Marlboro and Ruski Car awnings; shops glowed with understated light; fountains bombarded their own pools; people wore nice sweaters and down jackets; they appeared slightly fitter than Americans, probably because of less heat and food. A little boy in a soldier suit smiled at his mother and rushed to position himself grandly overlooking the fountain. His mother took a photograph. Then

she led him away.) Thanks to what had happened I had only the afternoon and evening before I must return to Zagreb, and maybe it was the temporary nature of my visit just as much as the Cyrillic strangeness that made me prize what I saw; maybe it was also the fact that I now knew the city a little, as well as some people in it; and my powers of expression in Serbo-Croatian had perforce increased since the death of Francis, who had always been so kind and patient and said everything to everybody for me, even girls in bars that I'd wanted to flirt with. So I stepped off the bus saying *Serbia do Tokyo!* to everybody and they were all smiling back at me. Passing a couple of boutiques with beautiful gunbelts and holsters and Sam Browne belts of red and brown leather hanging in the windows just above the wallets, I telephoned Vineta, whom I'd been unable to reach, of course, from Croatia. I had come back only because I'd promised her that I would; originally I was going to return with or without Francis (who'd had only ten days free—less, as it turned out; his biggest fear had been of dying old and alone), and then with luck Vineta would have arranged the permissions to go to Pale or Knin or maybe even Gorazde; now I had no time left but I didn't want her to believe that I was a liar like all the other Americans. And when I reached her I was so glad that I'd come; she called me dear boy again, said she hadn't been able to sleep when she'd heard the news on Serbian TV; her mother had baked a cake to celebrate my survival (I remembered the second morning she met me when she'd started talking about her family and said: Last night I told them that you weren't an average American journalist, a bullshitter and so on...); when I met her that night at the press center she looked so gorgeous and she hugged me for the first time; then I kept her company when she went to buy some new high heels. All the permissions had been arranged, she said. I really wanted to stay then but I couldn't. Her face could look so hard and cruel and merciless, especially when she was wearing a uniform and a beret and sunglasses upon which light so coldly glinted; the lips drew tight together; the nostrils flared with hate as she said: *Right between the eyes*. She was a warrior. Then there was the other face she had, the soft face when she smiled shining-eyed from under movie-star eyebrows. We walked past the crowded, tarnished red autobuses that passed each other so companionably in Beograd, and arrived at a bar that Vineta liked; I bought her coffee, and I bought slivovitz for me, and after awhile one of her best friends showed up, another tall, beautiful, terrifying Montenegrin girl named Masa (Vineta told me that the best way to compliment a Serb is to tell him he's so tall and fierce that you want to shit your pants—and certainly they were nothing like the two weary girls I'd met in East Mostar who walked arm in arm down the street with its pile of sandbags). Vineta was crabby at me because my passport was green, which is a Muslim color. Then Masa's boyfriend showed up. He was a cop, one of Milosevic's bodyguards, so I asked him what he thought of Milosevic, but Masa cut in and said that after all I couldn't expect them to run down their head of state in front of foreigners. I ran down mine in front of her, but she was still silent; and I suddenly thought

of a joke that my first Serbian interpreter, Branka had made (I'm not sure that Masa or Vineta would have liked Branka); Branka said that an American and a Serb were each boasting about their respective political systems and the American said: My country is so free that I can stand on a streetcorner in Washington and say that Bill Clinton is an asshole and nobody will arrest me! and the Serb said: My country is also so free that I can stand on a streetcorner in Beograd and say that Bill Clinton is an asshole... No, Vineta preferred the following joke: The Chinese wanted to make their mark on the moon, so they painted it red; then the Americans wanted to co-opt them, so on the red moon they wrote in red letters: Coca-Cola; but then a few days later they noticed some tiny writing beneath that so they sent a spaceship to investigate, and when the astronauts got close enough they saw the words BOTTLED IN BEOGRAD. —But that's just a dream, sighed Vineta... Since it was my turn to tell a joke, I recalled one that my Croatian driver in Hercegovina, Teo, had told me on the way back to Mostar, and when I repeated it to Vineta I discovered that it amused her, too. It went like this: Tudjman, Milosevic and Izetbegovic were out fishing, and one of them (never mind who) caught a magic goldfish. —Oh, please, please throw me back, it piped, and I'll give you each a wish! —OK, said Tudjman, me first. My wish is that the Serbs cease to exist. —No problem, said the fish. —Me second, cried Milosevic. My wish is no more Croats, not one. —Granted, said the fish. —And those wishes are for real? said Izetbegovic. —Guaranteed, said the fish. —Well, said Izetbegovic with a big smile, then all I need is a large cup of coffee...

Masa liked that one, too. She taught me how to say *jebi se*, which means fuck off, and *idi upicku materinu*, which means go to your mother's cunt, and I laughed, and then suddenly I was so tired and so sad and my bus would be leaving soon so I paid the tab and said goodbye to everyone; Masa and Vineta asked me to write them, and I promised that I would; and I told Vineta that I would always think of her as my friend no matter what, which I will;⁶⁹ then I walked back to my hotel, wished all the ancient prostitutes a good evening, lay down, and waited to have nightmares.

EAST MOSTAR

I admit that it had been less than pleasant to return to Mostar. The first time my friends had been killed, the second time I'd come for their bodies; and the third time the woman who ran the service I engaged to drive me kept saying: Bill, it's very dangerous. I have a very eerie feeling. I think you must not go back to Mostar. —But I figured I'd used up all my bad luck. In fact, I hadn't had any bad luck at all. I was alive, wasn't I?

You understand that Teo cannot go with you into East Mostar, she said. You will have to walk across alone.

What are the chances of my being killed?

Fifty-fifty, she said.

I thought to myself: Well, she's Croatian and I'm not. Let's go and see. If it looks too dangerous I just won't do it.

When I got there it didn't seem dangerous at all, and a Croatian guy who happened to have a Canadian passport agreed to go with me at least as far as the UNPROFOR checkpoint; he said he'd try the Bosnian checkpoint, too, if he felt comfortable, and he was a brave guy; he did it; and the Muslims let us through. The astounding damage was worst of all, as might be expected, closest to the front line, which brings to mind the Croatian proverb: *He who is closest to the altar gets the wine first*. That is why the bridge was not in very good shape. It was a gift from the USA in 1993; the barrages from West Mostar had bent its sides most artistically so that its scorched girders twisted away into the void. Crossing it was one of the braver things I've done, although it was really perfectly safe. It's just that I have acrophobia. Everybody else walked its ramshackle crisscross planks with confidence, some not even looking when the boards tilted under them; others watching where they put their feet because the planks were sometimes cracked and half-split lengthwise so that the piece one stepped on had a tendency to give way and there was always the possibility that it would break under the next passerby and the river was far enough down to be worrisome; those planks were like the tines of combs, with darkness in between. At one point when I had to force myself to take the next step, I thought of something Vineta used to say: *When I was scared, I got paler than a vampire*. That made me smile. The shattered boards groaned under my feet.

A policeman took me into that smashed and ruined city to help me get my papers in order. I paid his boss a quarter-kilo of coffee to obtain the most powerful permissions, came back out of that sandbagged lightless basement they called an office, passed the crowd of women who bent or squatted over the sidewalk with their hair hanging down as they washed their clothes or filled their wheelbarrows or water-jugs from the A-frame of steel pipes with its dangling hoses; gave out chocolates to kids by the mosque's half-crushed dome, walked back across the bridge and through the three checkpoints to West Mostar, told Teo and the other Croatian guy that everything was OK, and passed the checkpoints one more time just before they closed the border. Now I was alone.

I could speak for many pages about the way that guardrails leaned or twisted like shriveled black lips, half fallen into whatever pit they were meant to protect one from; I could tell you how fishy shapes of nothingness swam across roofless buildings, strange backdrops with their frozen raindrops of bullet holes; I could mention how the walls were scrawled with SDA's six-pointed star insides the jaws of a crescent, and how useless and even impertinent any symbol seemed; I could mention the Volkswagens turned turtle and unbelievably riddled.

“YOU SEE, THEY ATTACKED US”

You see, they attacked us, said my host. He was a Basque nationalist, but he'd converted to Islam, so now he fought for ABiH. —We never did anything, he said. We can live together like any other people. Our nationalism was never *I am Muslim; if you don't leave my territory I kill you*. In Mostar before, all was mixed. Now it's all very strange. I know that here in this part of Mostar live 55,000 people. Ninety percent is Muslim. The other is Serbs and Croats. We tell them, you are free. Some fought alongside us—Albanian, Slovenian, Serbian, one British, one German. We have no mercenaries because we have no money to pay them.

So what happened?

Look. It was the 9th of May '93 when the first attack came, at 5:00 in the morning. I was there. I was speaking with my friend, and he said it would be war. I did not believe. We are mixed. I could not believe. The conversation finished at 2:30 in the morning. At 5:00 began the grenades. I was so scared, I was so terrified, I was sick. I ran to my friend and I said: What can we do now? He said: There is nothing to do but fight. —Never before had I taken a rifle in my hands. All weapons we have, we take in action, he said.

This was the Croatian attack you're talking about, right?

That's right. This was '93. What the Serbs did, that was in '92. That's old history.

(Some other soldier-boys had showed me the cellar stairs in a grenade-ruined building and said that it was on those stairs that the Serbs had cut Muslims throats. But they, too, didn't care about Serbs anymore.)

My host prayed. Then he tucked the pistol into his pants and went off to the front line to trade in thirty kilos of bluejeans for the black market. I watched how his soldier and police friends sat in the tiny room by candlelight, their faces glaring and flickering intensely, and I knew that even a year before I would have been filled with wonder at the eerie beauty of their gesturing, but now I just watched and waited for them to go away. The soldiers wouldn't let me take their photo, and soon went out. Trapped by the police hour (if they caught you breaking curfew it was fifteen days digging trenches in range of the Serbian guns; that was East Mostar, but Teo, my Croatian driver, had refused to spend the night waiting for me in West Mostar, saying: Because dark time is police hour. And there are so many criminals with guns in police!), I sat in that dim room with its wanted posters, its star and crescent flag, its tank shell, its camouflage vest loaded with grenades and a Kalashnikov magazine whose bullets seemed to me to be dangerously contaminated with dirt and grit, another poster of a beautiful woman with a finger to her lips, and I felt so tired and discouraged. The house had belonged to a Croatian, but he'd fled, and now it was a series of rent-free flats. There were so many houses like that.

"MY FATHER IS ON THE OTHER SIDE"

Early in the morning, the cool air blew in with that scorched smell, that smell of scorched metal that was now a part of Mostar and which I had smelled in the car after Will and Francis were killed. Across the table, my host slept on, his narrow brown face immobile and serious, while the family across the stairs washed their hands and faces in the big basin. There were four new cartons of York cigarettes on the table, the fruits no doubt of last night's business.

On the street corner, crowds stood around smoking, the old men poking and tracing destinies with their walking sticks, women squinting and smiling into the sun. Soldiers in their heavy green camouflage tunics and coveralls sat on curbs chatting and smoking. Everywhere were sandbags and pocked and riddled buildings, and that scorched smell.

I went to some soldiers and asked them if they were fundamentalists as Vineta had said. One replied: Mujahideen are soldiers of God. I believe in God, but I am a soldier of my people.

They are talking forever in Belgrade, I don't know where, said another. For Bosnia, Milosevic says the east bank is for me, and Tudjman says west Bosnia is for me. I don't know. I think aggressor is just politics. I don't know.

What do you think about Izetbegovic?

My mother and father are Muslim, but I am atheist. I don't know. My one friend now you know hasn't hands and eyes, the soldier said, wringing his hands, big and strong and honest. Then he swallowed and said: Look. My father is on the other side. He's shooting at me.

Why?

I don't know.

THE BAD BOYS

Vineta, who was so harsh with herself that if she mispronounced an English word she'd punch herself in the side of the head, once lit up another of her Macedonian Partner filters, with the blue zone bisected by the red stripe, and said to me: All the bad boys are a bit stupid. Just kind of say what they think and what they feel. If you ask them why they think what they think, they get confused. —It was talking with the bad boys of all three sides that wore me down. I'd known from the very first, of course, that my two friends had died for nothing because this war had not been theirs and the mines or snipers' rifles or whatever had killed them did so really by "mistake," but more and more I started thinking that everyone else had died for nothing, too. There were always almost enough people like the young Muslim soldier in East Mostar to give me hope, the young soldier who said: War is stupid, very stupid. This war and the war before, the war with the Serbs. —But not quite enough. The soldier beside him was a blond guy who said: There is no difference.

Serbs will shoot you in the face, while Croats will stab you in the back. —And the next soldier shouted: I am thirsty to drink Croatian blood! —And everyone denied the other sides' atrocity stories; only Vineta said honestly and straightforwardly: Tudjman made the Ustasi flag and we were scared. Maybe we made mistakes, maybe we were jumpy, but we got scared. —At least she admitted something.

What about the others? There was the HOS man in Imotsky, his eyes alert and tense, who'd shouted when another soldier remarked that nobody had anything to eat in Mostar: After all the things the Muslims have done to us, we're still feeding them! They have committed greater war crimes than the Serbs. In this town many have died at their hands. Almost three hundred children were killed in Tvornik, Vita, Busavac. In this area the people were surrounded, they starved and the Muslims did terrible things to them. And now that we have an agreement between the Croats and the Muslims, they come here for food. —Then there was the Muslim in East Mostar who assured me: Here people say Serbs have concentration camps but there are five Croatian camps in Mostar. We have prisoners but we don't torture them in any way; we feed them. They beat us; they cut our fingers... —What are the names of these camps? I said. —I remember only three, he said. They are Gabela, Polce and the heliodrome in Mostar. —(That's an ordinary jail, said the Croatian press officer in Medjugorje drily, looking at my list. That's a dock. That's another jail. UNHCR has monitored everything. No complaints.)⁷⁰ —And on and on it went. Finally I didn't believe anything I hadn't seen with my own eyes, which is why I refuse to say who started this war. There was the man in Beograd at the press conference on genocide (the long table lush with green felt, microphones evenly snaked, and water glasses upturned on crystal saucers) who flashed me a photo of himself with Simon Wiesenthal to set the tone, then passed over a photo he'd taken of a dead naked man with red oval-shaped trenches where his eyes had been. —A Serbian fighter, he explained in German. The Mussulmen have done this. Near Zvornik. —He showed me a half-rotted skeleton exhumed from near Sarajevo; the Muslims had done that, too. —How could I tell?⁷¹ —Then there was Mr. Safet Bandzovic, the Muslim human rights guy in Novi Pazar, who'd given me 3 x 5" glossies of men with terrible bruises from beatings; these were Muslims who'd been beaten by Serbian police, he said. I asked if I could meet one of these victims, and he said that that wasn't possible—too dangerous for them. Why wasn't it dangerous for them when he gave me copies of these photographs? I wanted to know. —Well, he said, because these photographs are an internal matter...

I still have those photographs. They are sad and they are horrific and they prove nothing, like an Indian arrowhead without a provenance.⁷² Maybe I was as close-minded as the TV crews for CNN, about whom Vineta said: They're overpaid; they're impertinent. I especially hate Christine Amanpour, that black-haired girl. She's a real bitch, an American bitch. I'd like to fuck her if I could. She was forced once to make a pro-Serbian story. We found a big hole in Facovici. About three hun-

dred and something victims killed in the most monstrous way. People without skin, Bill, with their eyes picked out, put into a plastic bag. It was so damn stinky and I was so sick. And then that Christine Amanpour said: the Serbs claim that the victims are Serbs, but their stories never made an impression on me. —Look, Bill. That area is only either Muslim or Serbian. No Croats around. According to the genitals of the boys, you could see that they were not Muslim! —Vineta began almost to weep. —You should see all the mothers and sisters crying, kissing those half-rotten skulls...

Seeing East Mostar, seeing everywhere how the place had been so disgustingly ruined, worse even than Sarajevo when I was there in '92, that was not good for the soul to look at; but still I thought: At least here is something that can't be denied. This is a sample crime, not one by which any one side can be judged, but it is a crime and it is there, very evidently there, and we even know who did it. East Mostar was shelled most recently by the Croatian side. Any Croatian can look across from West Mostar and see it. So let me ask a Croatian what he has to say about it. Maybe somebody in this war will actually face something.

I was stupid, of course. I would have been better off still believing in people. The moment that I decided that Francis had been wrong and everything was truly and absolutely hopeless came when I crossed that hideously charred and creaking and bending and bowing bridge out of East Mostar, walked through the barbed wire gap of the ABiH checkpoint, passed the U.N. checkpoint, emerged from the HVO checkpoint where Teo was waiting for me a little anxiously, shook Teo's hand, got in the car, and asked him: Teo, why is East Mostar more destroyed than West Mostar?

Because Croats had more bullets, he replied with a faint smile.

I took a deep breath. —Who started the problem, Croats or Muslims?

It was the Serbs, he said.

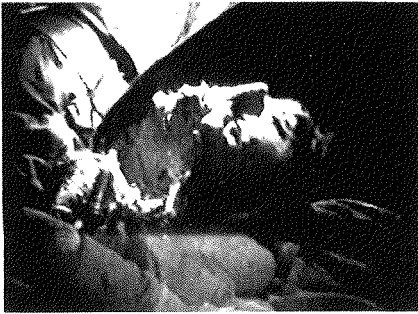
The Serbs!

Look. You know how Hitler started World War II in Poland, with a propaganda trick?⁷³ It was the same trick that the Serbian Secret Service used...

He went on explaining it all with utter conviction, and I just sat there as the car drove me slowly through West Mostar, pulling up at the press conference where General Milovoj Petkovic, the Supreme Commander of HVO, sunnily announced that the united command between Muslims and Croats was coming along just fine; Croats and Muslims were already fighting Serbs together at Tuzla—why, I was so tickled I practically hurled my hat into the air! He said the secret to future success was that the two groups must each fight only on their own territory,⁷⁴ unlike the former Yugoslav Army (JNA); I have to say that I thought this idea wise, given that I'd just asked a Cro Army man: Are the Serbs as good fighters as you? and he'd replied: No. They can't be good fighters on our land. It's not their land... —Given that not five minutes since I'd heard a fat man jokingly call his belly his homeland; given that when I'd asked Teo how much it cost to buy a house in Hercegovina he said that almost none were for sale and when I wanted to know why he said: Look,



Trifko Pavlović



Stevo Lugonja



Photos allegedly found in the camera of a Croatian soldier, Kupres; from a Serbian publication

Bill. In this country when you build a house you build for life. After you, your sons and daughters will live on in that house...⁷⁵

So there were all the Croatian journalists nodding and there was General Petkovic smiling; all points of difference between Croats and Muslims having been eternally solved, I went to one of those cafes of West Mostar inhabited by soldiers and by guys in sunglasses and tanktops who might have been soldiers or black marketeers and by elegant girls pulsing to the music beneath apartment towers which seemed to have grey stains and splashes on them, actually the concussion-marks of grenades (and I thought of East Mostar where there was nothing but silence and that scorched smell, that hot silence, that feeling of something bad about to happen, and an Armija Bosnia i Hercegovina soldier stared across the river toward the west and shouted: On the other side, they have everything: electricity, water, cafes, boutiques.

Here it's just rice, rice, rice, beans, beans, beans!); at that cafe I bought an HVO soldier a drink and asked his opinion, and he said:

Here are the Muslims, about twenty meters from the Croatians. I don't know, but I think the war is not finished. The war is from Croatian people and Muslim people. Not anymore the Serbs.

Why do they fight each other here?

He spread his hands. —I don't know. I think from politics.

I don't know, he went on, but it's better when Croatian people stay in Croatia and Serbs stay in Serbia. And Hercegovina should go to join with Croatia, and Mostar with Croatia, including East Mostar. The Muslims make too much evil here.

So the Muslims must leave East Mostar?

Yes.

Where should they go?

It doesn't matter. Just go away.

He was just an ordinary soldier, of course. He did not make policy like General Petkovic.⁷⁶ I am sure that his opinion was not in the least representative.

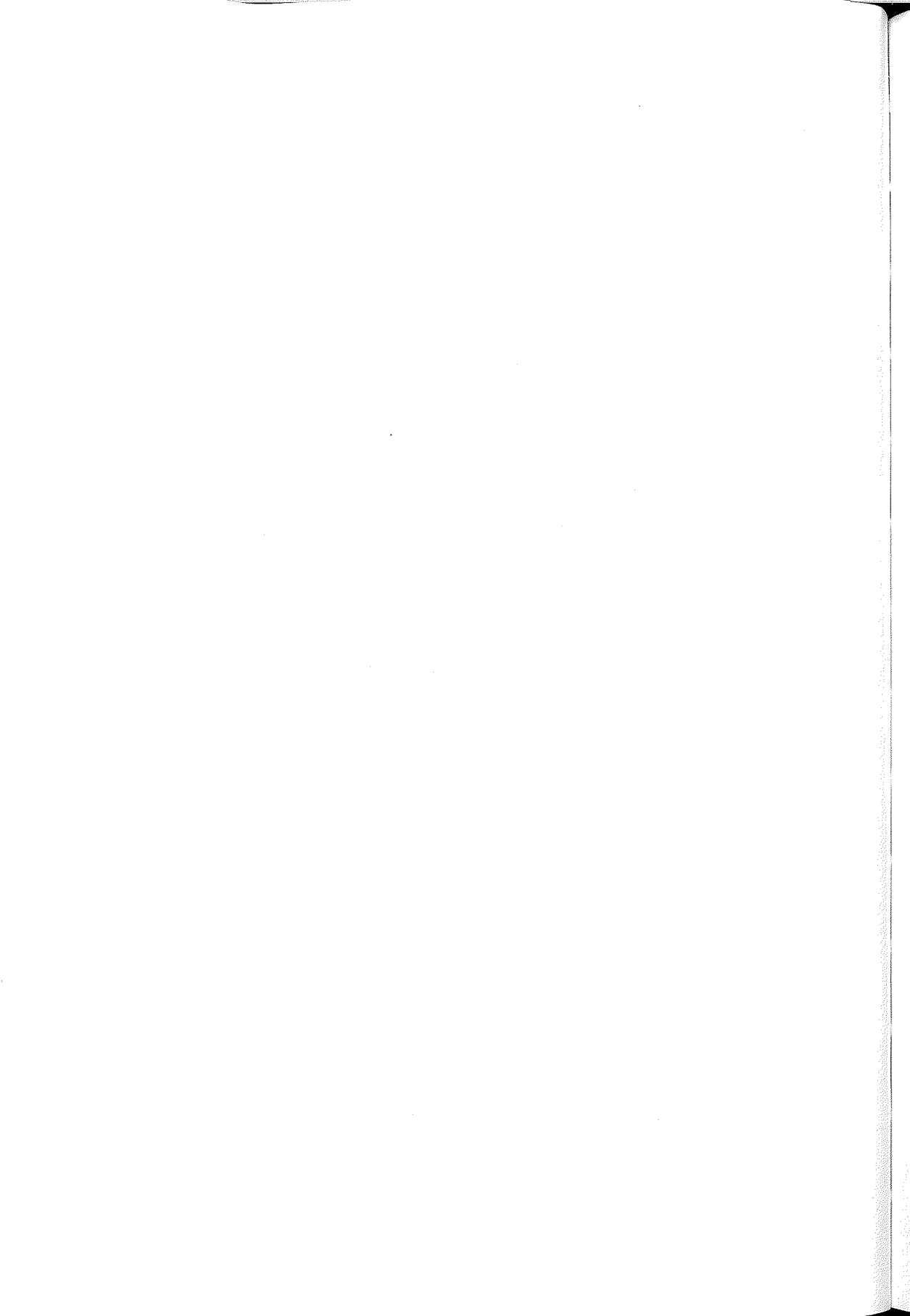
“THE WAR NEVER CAME HERE”

Perhaps the last word ought to be given to the HOS man in Split whom I interviewed the day before Will and Francis were killed. Wearily the man said to me: It's impossible to wage war honorably. —I thought that was a pretty good last word. And there was something that Ms. Plavsic had said: This cruel war, at least one-half of it is the responsibility of the journalists. —I didn't quite agree with that, but I thought it was interesting. Then there was the Serb who'd told me: Croatians say one thing; we say the other thing. So it's my word against their word. —That would have been a fine last word. And there was Vineta's last word, which also seemed applicable no matter which side one was on: I think that the truth will come out in thirty or fifty years and some people will be sorry and some will not care. —But then I heard an even better one. Crossing back into Croatia at Vinjanji, Teo, tall and strong, downshifted for the policeman, passed our documents out the window, received them back, thanked him, and began to accelerate again. I saw an abandoned and bulletpocked house and said: So when did the war come here?

The war never came here, he said, driving.

So what about that house?

I think it was just a Serbian house, he said. The war never came here.



THE AVENGERS OF KOSOVO (1998)

Kosovo speaks only of its defeats.

REBECCA WEST (1940)¹

“KOSOVO IS OUR JERUSALEM”

VINETA

Beautiful, wounded and full of rage, Vineta *is* Yugoslavia. I love Vineta because I love Yugoslavia. I love Yugoslavia because I love Vineta. Maybe she'd rather not be Yugoslav, I'm not sure. Well, she's my Serbian sister. Of course I understand that mutual affection will never suffice to wipe away the *alienness* which hangs in the air between us like blackish-brown smoke rising from a mortar shell. She is generous, passionate, sincere. Once I gave her American headache tablets of a kind which she had not seen before, and she cried in a low voice: I would take poison from your hands!—When I embrace her hello or goodbye, she goes rigid. Smoking cigarette after cigarette, she'll talk politics for hours. Sometimes I think that it's politics which keeps her alive. —What do Americans chat about? she once asked me. —Oh, I said, mostly about television, or shopping, or movies... —So *empty*, she said.

Yes, it is, Vineta.

Vineta *is* Yugoslavia. Vineta *is* Serbia. Therefore, she *is* Kosovo even though she lives far away in Belgrade.

The Albanians disagree. Kosovo is ninety percent Albanian.

Serbs say *Kosovo*. Albanians say *Kosova*. Thus you cannot even utter the word without aligning yourself one way or the other.²

Vineta is Yugoslavia, so Vineta must be politics. The American variety³ mostly bores me, but I can never get my fill of Balkan politics where every tale's a twist-crammed cliff-hanger whose plot begins and ends alike in mist, like the winter sky over Kosovo, history shading into sacred myth.⁴ How could anyone ever comprehend it all? And surely this goes far to explicate the main distinction between Balkan and American character: A Balkan type believes the universe to be more complicated than it really is, while an American makes it too simple. In a word, Vineta is paranoid, and I, childishly shallow. (She laughs when I tell her this.) I swallow the line that my government has dispatched peacekeepers to Kosovo in ugly orange vehicles because we desire in our blundering way to play the big shot everywhere, or because we want to neutralize Vineta's president (of whom she is not fond), or because we genuinely wish to help keep the peace. My notions are mere sentences instead of stories. Vineta, on the other hand, prefers to believe that we follow some darkly, coldheartedly eternal strategic design for her country's ruin. After all, her country *is* half ruined.⁵ Remember this: Once upon a time, and not so long ago, either, Yugoslavia comprised close to ninety-nine thousand square miles. Now it is only thirty-nine thousand.⁶ —Yeah, I live in the incredible shrinking country, man, Vineta says. And I'm getting claustrophobic. Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia... And now they want Kosovo. —Who are *they*? Albanians? Americans? I can't quite follow her, but maybe she's correct just the same. Could it be, for instance, that in our central European policy the U.S. anti-Communists have now turned themselves into anti-Slavists? Is that why we're against her in Kosovo? But I can't believe it. My country is preeminent not through statesmanship but only through a combination of natural resources, industrial efficiency, and dumb luck. Any anti-Serb "strategy" we have would be tempered by short-sightedness, vacillation and incompetence. My shallowness aids my faith.

One afternoon, Vineta and I were sitting in an Albanian coffee shop in Kosovo with our friend and driver Petar—who also of course is Serbian—when the coffee cups rattled, a noise which reminded me of the grinding of boot-heels on shards inside destroyed Albanian houses. Petar, quiet and gentle at most times, willing to consider both sides, regarded me at that moment with bitterness and said: This is our country. Your planes are permitted to fly here. Ours are not.

Can you understand why Vineta would be angry? Can you see why for her it's not merely about Serbs *versus* Albanians? Can you comprehend why even though she is my dear friend she will never entirely open up to me? Behind all her quick, cig-

arette-smoking give-and-take, despite the personal confidences she's entrusted to me over the years, Vineta remains as reclusive as the Serbian Orthodox Church behind its yellow wall in the very foreign city of Budapest. On one protuberance of that wall, I see a mounted warrior stabbing a wolf with his lance (or is this Saint George and the dragon, very crudely rendered?) Within the wall, from the fortress-like church a shuttered yellow tower rises with ominous beauty, its end like some immensely complex, verdigris'd arrowhead, studded with a cross whose points are barbed with crosses. Approach the locked gate, and no one comes. Maybe it's too late. Through the ironwork, a watchdog opens his eyes. I go away.

Vineta is Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is Kosovo. And so, when I ask Vineta what will happen if Yugoslavia loses Kosovo, she replies: *Then they will see what a Serbian rage is like.*

"KOSOVO IS OUR JERUSALEM"

There was a day and a night when my friend Misa the hotel clerk was not my friend. My country was bombing his country then. That had been four years ago, in 1994. Vineta was advising me not to wander around Beograd at night. Misa very briefly forgot that I had no personal responsibility for the airstrikes. I was afraid of him and of everybody. I went upstairs and locked myself in my room. The next day we were friends again. Misa said to me: After all, you're not the government. You're only a man like me. —I never blamed him. To most people, the provocation of having to serve an enemy alien at such times would have been intolerable. In 1998, my government's actions in Kosovo (to say nothing of our continued presence in Bosnia) insured that Americans in Yugoslavia would be hated as much as ever. I remember the angry contempt of the other clerks in that hotel; they avoided helping me whenever they could, and turned away from my good morning and good evening.⁷ —Amidst such welcomes I was all the more grateful for Misa's friendship. *He*, once he recognized me, became happy, shook my hand, gave me a Turkish coffee and a mineral water on the house. I'd brought him a fifth of Jack Daniels from America. After that, he poured me free slivovitzes each night. I'd stand up in front of his counter, as if it were a bar, and we'd chat in our half-broken German, or in his simple English and my two dozen words of Serbo-Croatian. He was only ten years older than I, but he looked older than my father. His wife was very ill. Like Vineta and (so it seemed to me) like Beograd in general, he seemed more beaten down now than during the civil war years, more apathetic, or fatalistically despondent, like the streets' walls with their torn political placards, the ministry window's forlorn civil defense poster which neatly rendered a shattered skyscraper, a burning house, and an atomic mushroom cloud, each accompanied by the appropriate instructions in Cyrillic. In place of Serbian nationalist graffiti, I saw (so I translate) ANTI-SYSTEM, ANARCHY and other such slogans. I saw names of rock groups. I saw THE

EXPLOITED, and then my favorite: NATASA TE VOLIM—*Natasha, I love you*—reverently repeated for a good three blocks. Vineta said she'd seen in one such place where it was particularly dilapidated AMERICANS—BOMB US OR ELSE PAINT THESE WALLS! And so there was my friend Misa, underpaid and getting old, a good true man, I believe, and also, like all of us, a wall on which life's slogans get inscribed. He poured me another slivovitz and sighingly browsed through the stamps on my passport, telling me that I had a good job. I wished better health to his wife, and he sighed again.

At seven in the morning, Misa and I were drinking shots of Greek metaxa at the front desk. I asked him whether he had plum trees for slivovitz at his home, and he said that he did. Then I asked him what he thought of the situation in Kosovo. Because we were speaking German, a language in which, as I mentioned, neither of us were utterly proficient, we both had to stay to the point. Misa looked into my eyes and said: This situation is too difficult for me. So difficult, and so sad. So sad for our land. Because if we are Israel, then Kosovo is our Jerusalem.⁸—And then he slowly wandered to the ancient switchboard, and turned his back.

PRILUZJE AND GLAVOTINA

A LESSON AT SCHOOL

Once upon a time there were two villages named Priluzje and Glavotina. If you look at a map of Kosovo you can find them on the road a dozen kilometers north of Pristina, past the Communist-era power plant whose stinking white smoke sometimes mixes with winter fog to sting eyes and throats, past slow, low-building streets crowded with poor people who loiter and shiver in their jackets. When I was in Kosovo it was so often cold and rainy. Kosovo, yes, cold and rainy, green and brown, outstretched its rusty cornstalks toward the greyish-white sky. And if you followed that road northwestward (being careful, if you were a Serb in a car with Beograd plates, not to continue driving much after dark), you'd very quickly reach Priluzje, which was the Serbian town.⁹ You could see Glavotina from there if the day were not too foggy, but if you could go to Priluzje you almost certainly couldn't go to Glavotina, because that latter place was an Albanian town, an insurgent town held by the Kosovo Liberation Army. The Priluzje people claimed that Albanians could come in to shop or collect their pensions, and maybe some did, although the Serbs might have exaggerated their own hospitality a little. The Glavotina people asserted that Priluzje had once been mixed but became "completely Serb"¹⁰ in 1987; until this year (1998), it had still been possible for Albanians to go there, but not any longer. (Some Albanians were here just fifteen minutes ago! laughed the president of Priluzje in reply—but about *him* the ones in Glavotina said: Zoran Kostic prepared the offensive against us. He is Arkan.¹¹ He is

REPUBLIC OF SERBIA - MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

PRESS RELEASE

A REVIEW OF STATEMENTS BY FOREIGN OFFICIALS ON KOSOVO AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE FR OF YUGOSLAVIA AND SERBIA

23 APRIL 1992

WASHINGTON, APRIL 23 (TANJUG) - UNITED STATES DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE L. EAGLEBURGER MET WITH VICE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA V. JOKANOVIC.

EAGLEBURGER REITERATED US DISAPPROVAL OF SECESSIONIST INTENTIONS, BUT INDICATED THE MINORITY PROBLEM IN KOSOVO.

23 SEPTEMBER 1992

ATHENS, SEPT 23 (TANJUG) - LORD OWEN UNDERLINED THAT "IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO CHANGE THE EXISTING TERRITORIAL BORDERS, BUT THE ALBANIAN POPULATION HAS THE RIGHT TO EXPECT, AT LEAST, AUTONOMY WHICH IT HAD UNTIL RECENTLY." BUT "THE PEOPLE REQUESTING INDEPENDENCE MUST ACCEPT THAT SUCH A POSITION IS SHARED NEITHER BY THE LONDON CONFERENCE NOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND CERTAINLY NOT BY EUROPE", HE SAID. THEREFORE, THEY "MUST ACCEPT TO NEGOTIATE WITH THESE LIMITATIONS".

BELGRADE, SEPT 21 - FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE CONFERENCE ON YUGOSLAVIA LORD CARRINGTON TOLD THE MILAN DAILY GIORNALE THAT IN HIS VIEW KOSOVO WAS THE 'MOST DANGEROUS PROBLEM OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA, FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA.'

STRESSING THAT KOSOVO ALBANIANS WERE 'ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE - INDEPENDENCE AND SECESSION FROM YUGOSLAVIA,' LORD CARRINGTON SAID THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE BOTH TO THE U.N. AND THE E.C. 'THE REGION BELONGS TO SERBIA, AND ITS BORDERS CANNOT BE ALTERED,' HE SAID.

25 SEPTEMBER 1992

NEW YORK, SEPT 25 - REGARDING KOSOVO, FRENCH AND SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTERS UNDERLINED THAT THEY DO NOT

paramilitary. Kostic should go to Serbia or the Hague Tribunal. Every night his son shoots at us with a big gun from the river... —to which Priluzje's police chief responded with a sad smile: God be with us! Now it's really stupid what they're saying. No one asked Kostic or me or anybody else here to plan the offensive. We're not war criminals. We're just protecting our families, and that's what we'll go on doing.) Both sides liked to exaggerate in Kosovo. In fact, the red-haired Serbian woman at the media center in the Grand Hotel in Pristina opined that both sides had been over-interviewed and over-videotaped to such a degree as to transform them into stage actors. As for me, probationary member of the Over-Interviewers' Guild, whenever I paid three hundred American dollars to a certain Albanian girl and her brother (to whom well-connected Vineta had introduced me), I could be driven to Glavotina via muddy back roads checkpointed here and there by KLA¹² soldiers armed with Chinese, Russian and Albanian machine guns; and as I got thus conveyed I could be warmed in an immaculate jeep and guarded by a handwritten safe-conduct pass signed personally by Mr. Adem Dimaqi, the head (or perhaps simply the chief spokesman) of the many-headed KLA. Thus, like my colleagues (none of whom I met those days because they happened to be busy filming gruesome funerals), I found myself in possession of the melancholy privilege of being able to tell people in each village about their former neighbors in the other. Priluzje's Serbs pointed up at the Albanian bunkers; Glavotina's Albanians pointed down at Serbian fighting positions in Priluzje. I never heard any shooting in either place, maybe thanks to the Milosevic-Holbrooke Accord, or maybe because everyone was cold and tired. The massive Serbian offensive of 22 September had accomplished its lethal ends, or exhausted itself, or both. Nobody expected the truce not to melt away with the spring weather. But in regard to shooting and such, I may as well say now that Glavotina was shot up and Priluzje was not. Or, to put it more precisely, Priluzje did show the very occasional bullet hole and mortar-crater, but Glavotina hunkered mainly roofless amidst its own rubble, its homes ripped into demented cross-sections whose stairways, charred through, ascended into nothingness, and whose cold stove-hulks were exposed to the sky. When the KLA soldiers entered these shells, their boot-heels rang almost melodiously upon broken glass and broken red roof tiles. —How would you like to live like this? a man cried out to me, standing in the carcass of his house. He was one of the few original villagers left. Only three or four families remained in Glavotina. The rest were scattered, taking refuge from winter where they could.

Thus Glavotina by attrition as well as by addition had taken on the attributes of a heavily militarized town. Who was there, but KLA? The women in the undestroyed dark old house on the hill were civilians, to be sure, but they'd assembled to mourn one of their fighters who'd been slain in a shootout with Serbian police; his funeral had been yesterday. He'd died on the front line, was how they put it. He was their newest martyr.

He was one of those who killed my nephew because he was a Serb, said an old man in Priluzje. They stopped the bus and examined all passengers and he was the only Serb. They dragged him out, cut off his ears and shot him in the back of the head. The Albanians don't kill that way. It's the influence of Bosnian Muslims.

How do you know that this KLA man was there? I asked, and the old Serb did not reply. Thus Priluzje; thus Glavotina; thus Kosovo, whose misty air is thick with blame.

In Glavotina that bereaved family gave me better hospitality than I deserved, because they'd been too afraid to claim the corpse from the Serbs, and so another foreign journalist had driven it home. (You'll have an excellent breakfast, Vineta had said bitterly, seeing me off, a KLA breakfast—roasted Serbs.) In the rain, a KLA sentry stood honor-vigil for the dead man beneath a double-eagled red banner, his AK-47 slung across his chest. They would not let me photograph that sight, saying: *Orders are orders*. And the old men who gave me tours of their ruined houses, they were accompanied at all times by watchful KLA cadres, some of whom wore uniforms, and others merely wore ammunition belts across their chests.

Obviously this fact gave Glavotina an uncertain moral character. Was the KLA presence here primarily an *effect* of the Serbian violence whose artifacts I saw all around me, or a *cause*? Let me give you an example to explain what I mean. At the end of my sole visit to Glavotina (I would have come again, but the requirement to pay three hundred dollars every time stuck in my craw), my tour guides took me to a destroyed school in the nearby town of Strovce. The headmaster stood wrinkled and grim on the front steps for my camera, wearing high rubber boots against the muck inside and out. Behind him lay a heap of broken branches with the leaves still on them, and the wide-yawning door, most of whose window-panels had been smashed. The Serbian schoolmaster in Priluzje had showed me a single bullet hole in one corner of a second-storey classroom. The bullet had come in through the window, he said, but the window had already been repaired, so in comparison with the school in Strovce it proved difficult for me to work up much concern. But the Strovce school went almost too far in the other extreme. Why did the headmaster leave the door ajar in the rain, no matter how ruined it was? Why didn't he rake away the new fallen branches? Could absolutely nothing be saved for the future?

The interior of the place, which I was told that seven hundred pupils had once attended, now signified stale doom. Serbian troops had come and gone. Wires dangled from dripping ceilings; mortar-holes wide enough to clamber through had pierced classroom walls so that through them I could see into other classrooms where broken desks stood up in rubble like frozen, broken-necked birds. I could well believe that teaching and learning could no longer be practiced here without great difficulties. I hoped that the children, wherever they might be, would be able somehow to surmount this barbarism and get their educations. On a desktop which lay like a tombstone upon concrete and plaster fragments, someone had scratched

the initials of the KLA. They took me down a dark wet hall and into a classroom whose chalkboard said ENGLISH—1ST LESSON beneath which title, yes indeed, ran the first lesson, ready to be copied. Had they brought me here in hopes of making my native language work on my heart? The classroom in Priluzje had been warm and dry. This classroom was cold almost to freezing, and we splashed in filthy puddles as we walked.

Here were our Albanian children, said Arguriana, my translator.¹³

They were here right until the 22 September offensive?

Yes, she said without asking the others.

No one ever shot at the police from this school? I asked, because the crucial fact regarding this school was *which side had first militarized it*. Firing into classrooms filled only with teachers and children is wrong no matter what the circumstances. Firing into classrooms emptied of teachers and children, from which insurgents have fired first, is another story.

Never, never, the KLA men insisted.

(What I know for sure, the Serbian police chief of Priluzje would later counter-insist in his office, is that *they were shooting from every building in that village*. I don't know how damaged the school is, because I haven't been there, and I'll probably never get there. —I for my part wondered how he knew what he knew if he hadn't been there.)

I contemplated the 1ST LESSON for awhile. I couldn't understand why there'd never been a second lesson. Had the school year just commenced when the Serbian offensive ended all classes in this building for good? Then I noticed something even more peculiar.

Arguriana, does school here begin in the spring or the fall?

The fall.

Then why is this first lesson dated April and not September? I asked, not trying to trip her up, merely to understand. There could have been any number of plausible reasons for this discrepancy. The teacher could have been killed in April, the pupils scattered, the class canceled. God knows, there'd been enough violence in Kosovo all year...

I don't know, was all that the Albanian girl said, and her eyes were cold. The KLA soldiers likewise regarded me without friendliness as we stood there in that dark and chilly ruin of a school, and I thought: No matter whether or not their struggle is justified, no matter whether their replies to my questions, or Arguriana's translations thereof, are *innocuously* incompetent, the fact remains that I cannot verify anything they tell me. Perhaps they were not present during the offensive. Most likely, in the manner of ideologues everywhere, they were simply offended not to be taken on faith. But I left the school with more doubts than I entered. In the other classrooms, the blackboards and even the dust on the desktops had been written on—KLA slogans, of course, KLA initials with and without hearts...

I said that both sides exaggerated in Kosovo. That is too kind. Unquestionably, both sides lied. Nor had I expected it to be otherwise. Lying is human nature, especially in war. The Albanians in Glavotina were not all the innocent victims they claimed to be. Nor were they quite the "terrorists" which the Serbs crudely labeled them.

SHOTS IN THE NIGHT

The first time I went to Priluzje it was late on a cold and rainy afternoon. My two Serbian friends were nervous and disheartened. Vineta kept rolling down her window to ask directions, which the Albanians almost invariably courteously gave, but a few hundred meters later she'd ask again, because we did sport Beograd plates. The first lesson of that school in Strovce was the first lesson which violence teaches any survivor: *Distrust strangers; double-check your friends*. Four years earlier, my colleagues had been killed in Mostar because we took a wrong turn, so no more of those, please. I was less anxious than Vineta and Petar because it felt as if whatever evil might befall us would occur slowly enough for me to protect my friends with my press card and American passport. On this road there were no snipers, no mine traps. Still, the twilight exuded an eerie feeling. Not so long ago, two Serbian journalists from the Tanjug agency had been kidnapped and beaten. —For them, there was hope, a Serb in Beograd had said to me. They were released eventually, once their wounds healed. But those two journalists from Radio Pristina, well, Bill, nobody talks about them anymore. Some KLA people stopped their car, and they were never seen again... —Perhaps it was that pair, vanished for two months now, of whom Petar and Vineta were thinking.¹⁴ (You think they killed them? I asked Arguriana. —Maybe they did something bad, the Albanian girl replied, with her innocent smile. —Like what? What could they possibly do? —Spying.) Or perhaps my friends were thinking of the two Serbian policemen who had been found with their eyes and other parts cut out. We passed the cemetery where one of them was being interred that very hour, in sight of the power plant's two smoking towers, and Vineta histrionically said: That place is so big because more Serbs are underground now than aboveground. Everybody's working on that, too.

And so we came to Priluzje, whose sign had been printed both in the standard Cyrillic used by Serbs and in the Roman alphabet preferred by Albanians. Vandal-ideologues had blacked out the Cyrillic. Vineta had seen so many similar defacements in Kosovo that she didn't even care anymore, she said.

Beyond a stone wall topped with a wall of dead cornhusks there was a shed between whose timbers we could see shiny yellow ears of stripped corn, and then there was the school teacher's house, which was clean and austere inside. The teacher himself was a quiet grey-haired man, cleanshaven and straight like his house. He invited us in—and as long as I am expressing suspicion about the blackboard lesson

at Strovce I had better mention here that the police chief of Priluzje, to whom Vineta had reported in upon our arrival, had introduced us to this man who in due course would show us the almost nonexistent bullet hole in his classroom, saying: They shot through the window. And from that direction also. They shoot in all directions. —It had happened during the summer holidays, the teacher went on. No one was hurt. —If you believe the worst of Serbs, feel free to conclude that everything the schoolteacher said was an act, that he was a propaganda robot wheeled out by the police chief for the purpose of tricking foreign journalists. I myself don't think so. Vineta liked cops and soldiers. They had protected her when bad things happened in her life. Moreover, it was prudent and respectful to announce one's presence to the local authority, particularly when one had an enemy alien, an American, in tow. She pitied the Serbian police of Priluzje with their half-broken chairs. And the police chief with his heavy yet cheerful face was not unappealing when he joined us during the interview, sitting there with his pistol in his belt. No doubt the police chief's presence did impart to the interview a certain official character, and, as will be seen, both he and the school teacher, like their counterparts in Glavotina, spoke not entirely without exaggeration. But I believe the most important thing they imparted. I believe that they were afraid of Albanians just as the Glavotina people were afraid of Serbs.

It was the schoolteacher's Family Day, an occasion which his family and Vineta's shared because both revered the same patron, Saint Dmitiri. Vineta had already celebrated with her parents, her sister and her brother in Beograd on the previous day, which was the actual date. The schoolteacher's family always made it last two days. The housewife, who was much younger than her husband, sat us down at a small square table across from the kitchen stove and served us Coca-Cola in tall glasses and fresh coffee with the black grounds packed tightly at the bottom of each tiny cup, Turkish style. Vineta had learned from a Hungarian woman (whose son had died in the war with Bosnia and Croatia) how to tell people's fortunes from their coffee grounds. I wondered what future she foresaw for this Serbian family to which she was so deeply akin. The Derby stove shone, scrubbed glitteringly clean. Pouring out his homemade slivovitz, the schoolteacher said that his family had dwelled in Priluzje for two hundred years (which implicit claim to the place the Glavotina people, of course, angrily disputed, shouting: Never! That family lived there only *one* hundred years! Before two hundred years there was no Priluzje, only forest. —And the next time I visited Priluzje I met a doctor who informed me that his family had founded Priluzje *three* hundred years ago.). I remarked that the schoolteacher must have seen many changes.

Many, he agreed. The changes were good in an earlier period, until the 1980s.

And then?

And then the differences came gradually in all fields of life.

What kinds of differences?

Between the nationalities.

What caused those differences?

He shrugged and smiled wearily, looking into space. His ancient mother, who wore a patterned kerchief around her head, remarked almost goadingly: You remember well. You couldn't go to Cecevica Mountain to get wood anymore. The communities became limited. You couldn't go in this direction, or that direction...

What is it like for you to be a Serb in Kosovo?

I feel endangered, the schoolteacher answered.¹⁵

How long have you felt endangered?

He licked his dry lips. —Since the 1990s. Since the beginning of the war.

(It would be easy to opine that Priluzje by virtue of its almost unscathed appearance and its continuing official legitimation as an enclave of Serbian Yugoslavia was somehow more solidly safe than Glavotina with its destroyed houses, and indeed this would be partly true. But the countryside's roadblocks of KLA soldiers in uniforms who checked every vehicle, the tractors going about their business on the dirt roads, the laughter when I asked whether my Albanian guides were worried about meeting Serbian police, reminded me that this other world, this guerrilla world which had already suffered terribly, remained in less danger of dissipating into vapor than the world of Priluzje. The parallel schools, the secret economy, the underground militants had all hardened into daylit overtness. In the rain, a KLA man in a black commando uniform waved us down. Five minutes farther down the road, a man in a camouflage uniform emerged from his dugout to check our safe-conduct pass. Then he stood patient, with the rain running down his rifle. No Serb would stop him.)¹⁶

Does the KLA ever come into Priluzje? I asked the schoolteacher.

Not that I know of. But I personally saw that they were very close to the village.

The old mother said: It used to happen that they knocked on the doors of our gypsies to get information about the village.

So the gypsies are on the KLA side?

No, but they had to do it.

Poor gypsies! They lived in the meanest houses, on the very edge of town, facing Glavotina, and no one trusted them. The second time I went to Priluzje, Petar and I met a gypsy who had been superficially injured by a single round from a KLA mortar one month ago. (There came three bullets and about four grenades that day, recalled the town doctor. This gypsy was wounded by shrapnel.) It had happened right here, in the foggy rubbishy grass, as the gypsy had bent down to "take paprika from the land" as he put it. He showed me his scar and his bloody shirt. Even I, would-be friend of gypsies, distrusted his exhibitionism. He reminded of that Albanian schoolmaster in Strovce. —But why does he *keep* that shirt? I wondered aloud. —You know, said Petar, there is a custom of blood revenge in Montenegro. When the first one is killed, his family keeps the bloody shirt to remember they

have to avenge him. For that old gypsy, I don't know. It could be very exciting for him. I don't believe it's Serb propaganda in that case.

When I went to Glavotina, of course, the KLA spared no sympathy for the gypsy's wound and said: All gypsies fight in the Serbian army anyway! (As for Arguriana, she didn't like gypsies because they were dirty.)

Very politely, the Serbian schoolteacher begged off from being photographed because he was afraid of Albanian retaliation. I searched around the kitchen for other victims. The little daughter, shy and well-behaved, looked most like her mother. She was very happy when I gave her an American quarter for a souvenir. I would have liked to make a portrait of her with her grandmother, but they were afraid, too, the mother said. It was getting dark outside, and Petar and Vineta looked anxious. Later the schoolteacher would take us to a U-shaped trench at the edge of town and point up at the bunkers of Glavotina, but it was too foggy and gloomy by then for me to see them.

They were shooting at our village, said his old mother, wiping her eyes. They always do it. We get used to it, so we get surprised if they don't.

The schoolteacher's cigarette was pointed up between his fingers like a tower. Smoke rose straight up as he sat straight and quiet.

In your opinion, sir, why do they shoot at you? I asked him.

I personally believe they want to intimidate us to move out. It started in May. Two people were injured in this village. You can see some damage in the school.

Do you have any non-Serbian friends?

Yes.

Gypsies, Albanians?

All national groups, he replied. Then in a lower voice he added: Since May we're not such friends, if you know what I mean. We just exchange hellos...

If the KLA were about to make some problems for you, do you think your friends would warn you?

No, he said calmly.

Why?

I suppose that they'd be scared...

(That is all very sad and very believable. But then so is the tale of the man I met in Glavotina who used to dwell in Priluzje. He abandoned his home in 1987.—Because Serbs want me to go, he said. Send me out.)

And how often do they shoot?

Every night, replied the schoolteacher.

They shot at you last night?

Yes.

How many times?

Maybe half a dozen.

I wondered where all the bullet holes were. The next time I went to Priluzje I

met a Serbian doctor who exaggerated less. Pouring me slivovitz in his house, in which one removed one's shoes, Albanian style (I have many Albanian habits, many Albanian customs, he remarked. I am a different Serb), he said that the Albanians had not shot at them for days. —They are very weak, he told me. If they are strong, they will attack. They work something only when they are ten on one. When they are one on one, they are silent.

“THE SERBS ARE THE BIGGEST LIARS IN THE WORLD”

Coming into Glavotina, which had once boasted a hundred-odd dwellings, I saw a shattered window, a burned chimney, a scorched black foundation, a house with a huge hole in the roof from the 22 September offensive, pale wet cornstalks dying in the fields. Glavotina's appearance really did not speak very well of the Serbs, but there are answers to anything. Zoran Kostic, the President of Priluzje, had complained to me: And the journalists get money from the Albanian lobbies all over the world!—One Beograd Serb, a translator for foreign journalists who'd had frequent occasion to visit Kosovo, told me in regard to a famous massacre: The police, some of them were shit scared. Some of them died. You can imagine that some innocent Albanians died. It was no six hundred people who died. Maybe forty... —Not a very good answer, really: Forty people or six hundred, a massacre remains a massacre. So likewise with gutted houses.

Half a dozen grizzled men in raincoats were standing in the cold, checking the documents of all comers. Men in uniform gazed out of a second-storey window. This was KLA headquarters, an Albanian informed me.¹⁷ Inside, in a smoky room filled with men who sat Muslim-style on a mat, an elder who would later kiss me good-bye on both cheeks gave an order, and I was served Turkish coffee, and then a young cadre said: They were shooting today from Priluzje. About ten minutes ago.

The boy pointed down and far away in the approximate direction of the sand-bagged, U-shaped trench which the police chief and schoolteacher of Priluzje had showed me, calling it *the last line of defense*. (God knows what will happen, said the schoolteacher. It used to be the cops who defended us. Now since the cops have mostly withdrawn thanks to American pressure, we have only ourselves.) No one had dared to pose for a photograph there except for Vineta, who smiled defiantly, making the three-fingered Serb sign.

Ten minutes earlier our jeep had been on a mountain road directly over Glavotina. I believe we would have heard the shots, if there'd been any. The KLA people must have thought me very stupid. They took me to a destroyed house littered with rifle casings, and informed me that the Serbs had shot these from their weapons. By Newton's Third Law, whenever a bullet flies in one direction, the casing gets ejected in the other, falling to rest near the shooter. Very likely the presence of all these casings in Glavotina meant that an equal number of bullets had

been fired in the direction of Priluzje. And this claim on the part of the Glavotina people that fire had come from Priluzje a mere ten minutes ago convinced me as much as the claim in Priluzje that friendly Albanians had been in town only a quarter-hour ago. Maybe both assertions were true, who knows? I merely asked the Glavotina people: How many shots? How much damage?

They shrugged. Then a man said: There are Serb villages all around our village of Glavotina, and at night we cannot sleep. From seven-o'-clock in the evening they shoot. During the daytime there are a lot of journalists.

(The schoolteacher in Priluzje had said that his village was surrounded by Albanian villages, which seemed the more plausible of the two statements, Kosovo being ninety percent Albanian.)

This year in Glavotina, I asked them, how many people have been injured or killed by Serbs?

Two.

No one killed?

No.

Kidnapped?

No.

In Priluzje likewise no one had been killed yet, only the gypsy and one weather-beaten farmer had been wounded (unless one believes President Kostic, who claimed that there'd also been a woman victim), and no one had been kidnapped. It seemed to me that the fears and hatreds on both sides lay far beyond proportion. I thought of one of President Kostic's typical complaints: Last Wednesday night there was a great attack from Glavotina. A child was screaming!

I said to the Glavotina men: In Priluzje the schoolteacher showed me bullet holes in his classroom. Are they genuine or not?

Not true. He's a liar. The Serbs are the biggest liars in the world. The KLA never shoots at civilians.

Somehow this remark brought to my mind that weather-beaten Priluzje farmer I just mentioned—a beggar now, said President Kostic, because he couldn't work his five hectares across the river anymore. The Priluzje people had lost four hundred hectares of farmland to KLA intimidation, so they said, which issue I duly raised with the Glavotina firebrands. —That's not true! cried the old KLA man with gold teeth. They took all the land! They burned the houses!

So how much land on this side belongs to them?

Ten hectares only.

I myself own ten hectares over there, a weary cop told me the next time I returned to Priluzje. You want to see the papers?

Oh, forget it, I said. I believe you...

A month before, on the sixth of October, the weather-beaten Serb with the five hectares had left his job at the power plant and set out to work his land. He swore

to me that he was in civilian dress. A uniformed KLA man put a gun to his head and requested his company farther up the mountain. When he saw his chance to run, and took it, the KLA man fired at him. —I didn't fear, the farmer said, but I didn't want them to kidnap me. I don't know how many bullets he shot at me. And I ran holding my hand where I took these bullets. Then I stopped running and started to walk. I called the police. From that day to this, I've no feeling in my hand. —And he showed me his yellowish-grey, puffy fingers. —I'm so sorry, I said. I hope you feel better. —Later, the village doctor told me: Two bullet wounds. The bones are broken forever.

All right, I said to the Glavotina people. What happened in the 22 September offensive?

They all buzzed like bees. —On 22 September, at seven in the morning, Serbian tanks came into the village, just there at those rocks, and they started shooting, said a KLA soldier, spreading his hands. —The offensive lasted three days. And on the third day they started burning houses. They burned them by hand. The population was hiding in the mountains.

(The police chief of Priluzje remembered it differently, of course. He said to me: I wasn't there, but the Albanians resisted fiercely. The Albanians were shooting at people all the time. I could hear them shooting even down here in Priluzje.)

When did the KLA first come to Glavotina?

That's secret, said the Glavotina people. We cannot tell you that.

When did you decide you wanted independence for Kosovo?

Since 1991. Since Milosevic.

What's your opinion of Milosevic?

We're not interested in him. He's a war criminal.

We will never leave our homes, said an old Glavotina man. We just want freedom.

But he'd had Serbian neighbors once. They'd left *their* homes, and not quite by choice. I remember the jovial Albanian in a cafe in Pristina who said: Before, Glavotina was mixed, but all the Serbs moved to Priluzje.

And why did they do that?

To be all compact, the Albanian replied easily.

Were they afraid?

I don't know, he said, not much interested in the feelings of these biggest liars in the world.

THE DEATH OF AMRUC ASLANI

In Kosovo, where life and lineage, property and history, all crouch disputed, even a man's death can become blurred by that same monotonous winter fog of hatred intermixed with loss.¹⁸ Someone falls by violence. Was it accident or murder? If it was murder, was the hatred political or personal? Or was the murder purely instrumental, convenient, without hatred attached? There was a Serb in Priluzje, the doctor I mentioned earlier, and whom I'll be mentioning again, who swore to me that in the pathology department of Kosovo Hospital he'd seen photographs of Serbian women who'd been raped and murdered by Albanian terrorists. I said that it would benefit his side if I could get copies of those photographs. The doctor studied me for a long time, then said: If I help you, do you promise to publish the pictures? —I promise, I said. —Then the doctor gave me the name of a pathologist he knew. Vineta, Petar and I went there. First suspicious, this lady had just begun to be helpful when her white-coated boss, looking daggers at me, summoned her away. Was it because there were no such photographs, or because I was American? Vineta said it was because I was a foreign journalist, with whom collaboration might amount to being a traitor; and also because officials and professionals in Yugoslavia continued to operate under the same principles of ass-covering inertia as in Communist times. —I said: Vineta, this is so very important. You want to help the Serbian side, so please find me photographs of raped or mutilated Serbian civilian corpses, with legal attestations that Albanian terrorists killed them. —And so Vineta telephoned a lady judge who could offer me only some photographs of burned bones which the Serbs had found in a pit two months earlier after marching into a KLA area, which was why the judge assumed that the victims must be Serbs, but she could not absolutely guarantee it until the forensic experts from Helsinki Watch had examined these relics. Then Vineta called another judge, who told her, naturally, that it would take time to find and copy any relevant documents. I am still waiting, and the doctor's allegation remains unproven.

As for the atrocities committed by Serbs against Muslims, I did not visit any of the famous sites of mass graves because the roads were too unsafe for anyone to drive me there. About one of these places Petar said to me: When you call them mass graves, you think of one big hole in the ground. But it wasn't like that. According to police officers' statements, they were killed in battle. When the authorities took over, they buried the dead just there. The bad thing, I must admit, is that they buried them in the garbage dump. The other things, no. They were not mass graves in the sense that the German journalists say.

What am I to make of this? Nothing, I guess. I saw nothing of this; I interviewed no eyewitnesses; moreover, I have no forensic training.

Well, what *did* I see? On the way to Glavotina, my Albanian translator regaled me with vistas of ruined buildings, and then we passed an untouched cottage or

two, and then on the wet green meadow farther up the mountain, there were more burned houses. I had asked her the previous night to show me some murdered Albanian corpses if there were any fresh ones, or else the graves of the less recently dead. We halted again, where a man in KLA uniform stood waiting in the rain beside the scorched shell of his house. He was Arguriana's cousin, who just happened to be (so she rendered his title) "KLA commander for the eighth village."

It happened two months ago, he said. On 22 September, he said.

Were you shooting at the Serbs at that time?

The Serbs came first. No KLA shooting. No nothing. *This was my house.*

(For the record, here is what the police chief of Priluzje asserted about such matters: What I can say as a member of the Ministry of the Interior is that our police never acted against houses that haven't shot at us. I really have never in my life seen any police with benzene in their hands to burn houses. —So how do you think all the Albanian houses were destroyed? I asked him. —I don't know of any weapons that can do that.¹⁹—And here is the testimony of the young doctor from the same town: I wasn't in the same place you were, but I was mobilized as a policeman in V———, so I could say the houses were burning. —And were the KLA shooting from every house you burned?—Yes, he said.)

Why did you become a soldier? I asked.

To fight for freedom, the KLA commander said. For my kids.

What do you hope for?

Independence.

How many years will it take?

I don't know.

If you gain independence, would you prefer to join Albania or not?

It depends. The main thing is just not to live with Serbs.

And the Serbs who live in Kosovo now, what about them?

We are not with the Serbs. We fight them. They massacre children. We hate them.

All of them? What about the people in Priluzje?

We hate them, he said, glaring at me. *All out!*

I wandered behind him through his shattered roof-pottery. He said: They mined this house with mines that day. You see the hole? And here is blood. Here died my father. *They shoot him*, said the man in his cold and ruined house. —My father was here. And they come by tank and go in here. My father was alone here.

Why did they shoot your father?

Just because he was Albanian. He was seventy-five years old...

In what part of his body did they shoot him?

All body. They shoot seven-eight times.

You found your father when you came back home?

He nodded, standing there beside the purple-brown blood of his father, and his father's shoes, and the heap of his father's clothes.

It began to rain when we went outside, and the puddles foamed and seethed in the mud around the dead houses. He took me to the roofless granary where his store of corn now resembled scorched black pellets of shot which shone in the rain. The KLA commander said: For the first time, the orders in this offensive were to burn food. And they shoot the animals. They steal everything. They shoot the old people. But we must stay here...

For the sake of argument, let's suppose that his tale was true, that this dried blood and this heap of clothes comprised the relics of his father who had been murdered in cold blood by the Serbian police. (For all I know, he might have been showing me chicken blood.) The destroyed house itself and the burned corn give evidence of the regime's methodical ferocity. But I begin to be oppressed by some of the same considerations as in the wrecked school in Strovce. The commander did not want to tell me when he had joined the KLA, but since he was a commander it is a fair bet that he had belonged before the Serbian offensive, which had occurred only two months previous. With his gun and his uniform, he had obviously become a combatant, and if he had died in a shootout with Serbian troops I would have pitied him no more than I would any other killed soldier on either side. So had he militarized his home? Was he telling the strict truth when he claimed not to have fired a single shot against the Serbs during that offensive? Had he fired no shot against them prior to the offensive? And what was his father doing there? Let's assume that the old man was a noncombatant too weak to run away. Let's say that the Serbs found him and committed an atrocity. Did his son bear absolutely no responsibility for this? In my country, a man who shoots at police while keeping a wife or child beside him is considered to have endangered his companions, and, should the police's return fire kill one of them, to be at least somewhat at fault. The Serbs who killed the old Albanian man were monsters. But the hands of the son might not be clean.

And now let us return to observe the next round in the game of accusations between Priluzje and Glavotina. Let us hear the case of Amruc Aslani.²⁰

Some Albanian in Priluzje, they killed him in his own house two months ago, the Glavotina men told me bitterly.

What was his name?

Amruc Aslani. He was alone in his house.

He must have been a brave man, to remain in Priluzje after all the other Albanians left.

He was alone, they said. He was more than seventy. They beat the old people in Priluzje, two months ago and now. And they killed him.²¹

In Priluzje, the police chief's office was chilly, high-ceilinged and almost empty—file cabinets in the corner, a dormant space heater, a map, a poster identifying Serbian police insigniae. The police chief was the same age as Vineta, who is a year younger than my youngest sister, but he looked much older with his uniform

and cropped hair. Speaking with his hands clasped against the cold, he said: Well, Amruc Aslani used to live between Priluzje and Stanovce. He was in a fight with his family. I heard that he was killed, but it could only have been between them. I'm sure no one from this village killed him. Well, well, so now they're using that in their propaganda.

Do you know any more details about the case, officer?

Actually, it had to do with his brother. Blood revenge is a very common thing among Albanians. They had three or four quarrels about land and property. He killed one of them, so then his brother killed him. The man was just sitting in his yard. Who else would have reason to kill him?

So everyone who killed and was killed in this matter was Albanian?

Yes.

And the case is open or closed now?

Closed. We cannot conduct any investigation into that, since the killer is on Albanian territory. He's walking freely. He's probably in some other village.

How was he killed?

Probably by pistol.

The third version of Amruc Aslani's death came from a Serb in Priluzje whom Petar and Vineta later warned me for his sake not to identify. It always offends me to obey such strictures, but it is better to do so than to endanger anybody. This man said over glasses of homemade slivovitz that Amruc Aslani was indeed beaten to death by Serbs, but that he had been a cruel Albanian policeman. At some point after their fear and hatred had been exasperated by the nightly sniping against Priluzje, my anonymous source said, the Serbs decided to beat any Albanian who entered their town. They had not meant to kill him. He died of his injuries twenty days later. The man said: I don't want to exaggerate anything Serbian or Albanian.

The fourth version came from the Albanian coal miner in Pristina, who said: He was my school friend. I was not there when it happened. But all of them tell to me he was killed. By Serbs. With a gun, near his house.

Why?

He spread his hands. —Just I suppose. . . —and his voice trailed off.

Was he ever on the police force?

Not a police. Just a simple man.

Did he ever have any problems with his brothers?

The miner hesitated. —Thirty years ago. But not now.

There you have it. Vineta believed the police chief's version. I do not. To me the tale of the anonymous Serb in Priluzje rings truest, because it goes against self-interest as confessed, and because the teller was most likely to have observed the crime he described. But each story contradicts the others on some point. The miner was in his late forties, so if Amruc Aslani were truly his school friend, then he could not have been seventy years old as the Glavotina people claimed. The two Serbian

accounts are divided as to whether he was beaten or shot; so are the two Albanian accounts. He was a former policeman and he was a simple man. It scarcely matters what I believe, or even what really happened to Amruc Aslani. The real point is that after telling us his version of the murder, the coal miner began to look so sad, and I asked him whether Glavotina and Priluzje, Albanians and Serbs, could live together, and he became even sadder so that Vineta hung her head and Petar slipped his arm protectively around her as the miner said almost in a whisper: Well, you know, it's been so many years... They used to be my friends and neighbors, and now I don't think so.

Why?

Because I see it's not possible.

Everyone in the cafe (it was an Albanian cafe, of course) sat around listening, and I asked: How many agree that it's not possible?

One man spoke up: No, we can live together, but the Serbs don't want to live together.

Another man insisted: If we live with Serbs, the police cannot guarantee our safety.

THE DOCTOR'S OFFER

And here we have the crucial issue for Priluzje and Glavotina, as for Kosovo at large—not what their history is, or who lived here first, Serbian royalty who ate with golden forks,²² or noble Illyrians who resisted the imperialism of ancient Rome²³—but only whether or not their mutual hatred is revocable.²⁴

Is it possible for Serbs and Albanians to live together in Kosovo? I asked the Albanian coal miner.

Now it's not possible, he replied. Many murders, many...—He spread his hands.

Do you think the Serbs of Priluzje should stay or go?

I'm born near Priluzje, and my neighbors are Serbs, he said carefully. We were living very good, but political reasons now make Serbs and Albanians fight. They cannot live together.

From this reply I infer his meaning to have been: *The Priluzje people must go.*

Into my head came the idea of bringing a Serb to Glavotina and an Albanian to Priluzje. Petar rejected any participation in this, accusing me of journalistic adventurism, of a desire to experiment with the lives of others. He was a Balkan type; he overestimated the complexity and deviousness of my motives. I, being a shallow American type, underestimated the difficulties for all concerned. Truth to tell, I was no laboratory experimenter. It simply made me very sad that Serbs and Albanians had diverged so widely that they no longer had the opportunity even to confront each other's accusations. Wasn't it better to try and fail than to be despairingly, bitterly raging like the people in Glavotina, or fearfully bunkered down like the Priluzje people who still had so much left to lose? I invited Vineta along, longing

to learn what common reality could be hammered out between her and a roomful of KLA militants, but she replied: The Albanians in the mountains may just capture the Serbs and do whatever they want to them. You can't stop them. And you can imagine if I go there and then come back who will ask me questions about what. Bill, I am not such a chicken. I would wish the Albanians everything worst in the world, but if I see something I would feel like protecting them. I simply don't care—

If we took Vineta and Petar with us, could you guarantee their safety? I asked Arguriana.

No, she responded with her customary smile.

Well, would you go to Priluzje if Vineta guarantees *your* safety? She says she can...

It's dangerous for us to go there, because we took some Serbs just now.

You mean you kidnapped them?

Yes.

The police chief of Priluzje in his resplendent uniform with the yellow chevrons and his red, blue and white shield, he couldn't visit the other side, either. He said: If I only try to protect anybody, if I crossed the bridge, I would get a bullet in my forehead. It's only because I'm a Serb, policeman or not. I myself don't divide people into ethnic groups, only into good and bad...

Eventually I gave up on my stupid American idea. But still I hoped that somebody from one side would at least be willing to write a message to a friend or former friend on the other side. If I could do anything, however insignificant, to help Priluzje and Glavotina talk to one another about their mutual estrangement, my visits would at least have served some purpose.

And so I asked everyone I met. They all said no. Finally I asked the doctor.

When we first met, he and I nearly wrote each other off. Balkan type that he was, he believed that the ethnic strife in Kosovo had been caused by Machiavellian internationalists—namely, American plutocrats. —There was geological research in 1989 that shows under Kosovo is oil, he began.²⁵ An American firm called Texaco offered fifty billion dollars if all the population of Kosovo would leave. Then the Americans could take the oil...

Where did you hear that, doctor?

Every Serb knows that.

The doctor poured out more slivovitz of his own making and demanded to know of me why America wanted to fuck Serbia the way that America was fucking Iraq.²⁶ —If Russia was not weak, there would be a balance, he said. U.S. is just fuck the world.

I agreed with him that what my country was doing to Iraq was wrong. I had just been there. But I denied that my government's international policy was "fuck the world." As always, I tried to defend and explain what I never had considered entirely defensible but which surely could not be as terrible as anti-Americans thought. I became an irritable patriot. I argued; I disagreed.

You see, we were under sanctions for more than nine years, and we live here normal! the doctor shouted. Perhaps we live poor, but we live happy! That's why if America don't attack now, they'll never take our oil. People cannot see the solution of these ethnic problems in Kosovo, and so they are afraid of Americans. They are not afraid of Albanians.

Even the Albanians in Glavotina?

Even them. A few months ago, when one Albanian child was ill, they came for me in the middle of night and asked me to come. I went to the village. Then I saw KLA. And I had no troubles.

(That was when he told me about the barn made out of Serbian gravestones.)

All the people in Kosovo can live as they lived before, he insisted. This is the game of the great powers. I have lived with Albanians thirty-three years and I may live another thirty-three years. There are some promises from Germany and the U.S. to the Albanians. I don't know if they will keep those promises.

In that case, what would happen, doctor, if you and I were to walk across the bridge to Glavotina?

I don't know, he said, sticking another long cigarette in his mouth. I would be mad if I didn't have a guarantee. They behave as if the bridge is the border.

It would be wonderful if these two villages could at least talk to each other. Can you think of any message I could bring from Priluzje to Glavotina? I already asked President Kostic. He said he had no message—

You can tell the Albanians then from Doctor M———— that you and I can live together forever, and we don't need that shit.

Maybe you could write them a letter, so they'd know that I wasn't putting words in your mouth.

Oh, it's going too far! But no matter that I am Serb, I will be on service to all Albanians.

You see, Bill, Petar interjected, they have the goodwill in Priluzje but they are afraid to show goodwill for KLA. That's why you can find no one who wants to talk to them.

I cannot write a letter today, said the doctor, but if the Albanians write me a letter today, I will answer it. And if some Albanians go to Pristina they can meet me and we'll talk over the problems. I'm not ashamed to meet with any of the Albanians. The M———— family will guarantee their safety.

And so, feeling that I might at least be able to do some small good, on the morrow I set out for the Albanian side.

Why do you want to go to Glavotina? Arguriana asked me. She had never been there; she had no interest in Glavotina.

I was in Priluzje yesterday, and they told me how afraid they are. They say that the KLA shoot at them every night—

Well, of course it's not true, she interrupted.

I described the doctor's invitation and asked her: Do you think that's good or bad?

She shrugged.

You don't care, I said.

Don't care, she agreed.

We rode along in silence for a moment, and then she said: Because they massacre children. They have no feelings.

In Glavotina I repeated what the doctor had said, Arguriana grudgingly, sullenly translating, and some were angry and others merely stared at me as people stare at moonshiny dreamers, so finally I said: Do you want to send any reply?

We don't know about that, they replied contemptuously.

Don't you know Doctor M———? He said he came here a few months ago to treat a sick Albanian child...

Not true! Liar! they shouted. He was never here! Dr. M———, we don't trust him. And the M——— family, we don't trust them.

I asked a villager: Would it be better for the Priluzje people to stay or go to Serbia if you get independence?

Better to stay here, said the old man. Just not to shoot at us.

I tried one more time, saying: You know, as a journalist I can go back and forth between the two villages. Think of me as your postman. When I was in Sarajevo during the siege I took letters from Muslim families to their relatives in Beograd. And just now I've brought a message from the doctor to you. Do you have any message for anybody in Priluzje?

No, the Albanian girl translated with her usual tranquillity. They don't have no message.

A man shouted: That doctor is such a liar! We want to have some words with him. We can *never* live with Serbs, *never!*

And somebody threatened to cut the doctor's throat.

Much later, I learned that an old man had said to the Albanian girl's brother: The doctor is a good man, but I cannot say so publicly in front of these others.

The next time I was back in Priluzje, Petar, Vineta and I dropped by the doctor's house.

How much shooting was there last night?

No shooting, he said.

His young, cigaretted face gazed at me, and he asked: So, you went to Glavotina?

Yes, doctor, I answered, telling him what they had said. He shrugged, his face sad and resigned. I'd been the fool that everyone proclaimed me; his pessimism had been correct all along. I admired him all the more for trying. He was practically the only person I met in Kosovo who was willing to meet the other side.²⁷

He poured me slivovitz and said: Kostic is receiving threats, and now I'm receiving threats. Why should I receive threats, just because I am a Serb?

We sat there for awhile, and I asked him: What's the most frightening thing for you and your family?

My little boy's afraid, he said. When they start shooting, he says *pom-pom* and runs away. But I'm not afraid of anything.

Then he said: I'm glad you were received by the Albanians. You can see how poisoned they are.

AND PRILUZJE?

And Priluzje? I had asked Arguriana. Should those people stay or go?

Better for them to go into Serbia, of course. Because the people are angry now. You wouldn't be sorry if they had to leave their land?

Smiling, she spread her hands.

THE SCULPTOR

Professor Agim Çavardasha, known in some circles as "the second smartest man in Kosovo," after Rugova²⁸ (of course for Çavardasha there had never been any *Kosovo*, only *Kosova*), appears well cast in his exhibition catalogue photograph as the incarnation of one of those ancient Greek philosophers with whose idealized busts we are so familiar: searching eyes, a smooth forehead, cropped hair, and a soft, thick, yet moderate beard and moustache which combine to clothe the lower third of his face in sageness. Vineta thought him quite handsome even though he looked much older than in that photograph (he suffered from kidney trouble which might prevent him from working again). Vineta also adored his flat, his atelier, and certain of his more square-angled pieces—Çavardasha was in fact a well-known sculptor. His propensity for artistic generalization—I will not say abstraction—fit the man. The wooden and marble forms he'd made reached out at principles. Thus his depiction of the first time a band of women defied the traditional ban on female attendance at Albanian funerals: Slender statues face us, the forms schematized almost to nothingness—except for the eyes gazing at us out of each otherwise blank head. In short, Çavardasha was extraordinary in a highly rarefied way. He if anyone would be at several removes from those other Albanian Kosovars who stood inside their destroyed houses, smoking cigarettes, pointing to ruined stoves. He had heat and food. He had a family, recognition, a Muse. These privileges enhanced my interest in his political views because if in spite of all he possessed he still asserted, on the record, and in front of Petar and Vineta, that he desired independence for Kosovo—in other words, if unlike more atomized intellectuals he could not be bought with comfort—that fact would furnish a yet more relentless indication of the ill prospects for Albanian and Serbian coexistence in the region.

Born in Kosovo just before the end of the Second World War, Çavardasha lived what he called a happy childhood. In those days, any Yugoslav could go to Pristina,

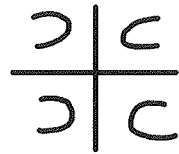
Priluzje or Glavotina. (Let us quote our friend Dr. M———— in Priluzje: During World War II, on this side was Serbia. On the Pristina side was Greater Albania.)²⁹ The troops of his country of nominal citizenship never reduced his parents' stairs to blackened cross-sections; if he played among any smashed and crunching things, the responsibility was that of the Germans and Italians. He finished primary school in the Albanian language, then secondary school in Serbo-Croatian (as it *used* to be called, Vineta interjected drily).

A DIGRESSION

His education seemed so unthinkable now. Arguriana agreed that she could have attended a Yugoslav school, or I guess I should say a Serbian school, had she chosen. Her older brother did. He'd studied Serbo-Croatian, and his Serbian classmates had studied Albanian. But his epoch was less polarized than Arguriana's. When I wondered why she didn't want any such education, she replied that if she'd gone that way her friends would have called her a spy. In war one must conform. One must go to approved schools and live in approved areas. One must uphold approved things. And the schools for their part, they became rigid uniforms for the pupils to wear. In place of medals, they present slogans, graffiti, furtive and open marks.

I see in my mind's eye still another ruined Albanian school whose halls I'd recently wandered through just west of Pristina. Written on the walls (no doubt by the victors, the destroyers) was the word SRBIJA. I also saw the four C's nestled in the cross, two C's frontwards, two backwards, which appear on the Serbian coat of arms, and which stand for *Only unity saves the Serbs*:

Four years ago, during the three-cornered war between Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, I had bought a cap with that ensign. In Beograd the four C's were everywhere. They made Vineta happy. Now they'd retreated to walls under bus overpasses in Beograd, but in Kosovo they could not be missed;



they accompanied such other banners of militancy as THE ALBANIAN NATION CAN BLOW ME (Vineta laughed at that one and said: It's really pretty good, actually!) and I'M NOT JUST PERFECT: I'M SERBIAN TOO—to say nothing of KLA: IT'S NOT JUST A DREAM and KLA and KLA and KLA.

NATIONAL OR NATIONALISTIC?

Çavardasha's school days were spared that. Like so many older Yugoslavs, our sculptor looked back on the Tito years almost fondly. He said to me: Compared to such Stalinist countries as Albania, there were many freedoms. —Like many other Albanian Kosovars, he could believe in a steady increase in living standards and political power in what had become the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and

Metohija. Kosovo, like the Hungarian autonomous province to the north, remained a part of Serbia in those years, but it enjoyed its own assembly and executive committee. His sculptures, which frequently evinced a chillier whimsicality than their titles implied, were exhibited in Beograd, Paris, Alexandria, Cologne, and of course in Tirana. There was, he said, a *national* note in them, but not a *nationalistic* one. Even Vineta's harsh consistency did not find them problematic. For example, since Albanian women were so often accused of breeding like rabbits, one of his pieces depicted a mother raising up her many children to the sky. (We didn't see that one. It had been smuggled into Tirana for a show, and no one had smuggled it back.) Another work memorialized the Albanian soldiers returned home from the recent civil war in coffins, and a third was his famous Pieta, in which an Albanian mother carved out of white marble mourned for her slaughtered child.

In the first decade after Tito's death, the antagonism between Kosovo's Serbs and Albanians had already become marked. (Çavardasha used the word *apartheid*.) Kosovo was always the poorest constituent of Yugoslavia.³⁰ After the huge demonstrations of Albanian nationalists in 1981, when Albanians killed some Serbs, and Serbian troops in reprisal killed many Albanians, none of Çavardasha's Serbian colleagues attended his latest exhibition. In 1990, the ruling bodies of the province "ceased to exist," as my *Political Guide to Yugoslavia* succinctly put it. "All their rights and responsibilities were taken over by the Assembly and Executive Committee of the Socialist Republic of Serbia."³¹ In 1991, Çavardasha and all his Albanian colleagues were fired from the Faculty of Arts. It happened to him while he was on holiday. Returning, he found the announcement in his box. The alleged cause was his absence at a certain unimportant meeting. His Serbian students called for his reinstatement; his Albanian students were already boycotting the university. That was when the movement for parallel classes began.

He said: The guy who fired me was my ex-student, a Serb, who learned everything he knows from me. He became a dean later. If he sees me on the street, he looks away. Only Serbs remain on the faculty now.

And so Çavardasha taught in his atelier. Since he and the students had no money for transportation and thus had to walk there, they often cooked and slept there as well. For the first year and a half, he received no salary. Then the ethnic Albanian government-in-exile, or what the Serbs would call the shadow government, began paying him out of the secret taxes collected from Albanian Kosovars.³²

Does the Serbian state pay you any pension?

No, nothing. It's funny you would even ask.

His Serbian ex-students sometimes stopped him on the street to request technical advice. His Serbian ex-colleagues continued to boycott all his exhibitions.

If Serbian students had attended your classes in the atelier, Professor, would the Albanian students have made them feel welcome?

I think not, said Çavardasha with a weary smile.

9 November, 1998

Media Centar
Pristina

04:15 PM CET

Bodies of the policemen Ilija Vujosevic (1960) and Dejan Djallov (1975), that were kidnapped on Friday on the road between Malisevo and Oriate, were found this morning not far from Malisevo.

According to the first results of the investigation, the two kidnapped policemen were killed by firearms from a close distance.

The investigation of the crime is underway.

Ilija Vujosevic, policeman from Pristina and Dejan Djallov, police conscript, were transporting the supplies for the police by truck.

The police patrol found their bodies this morning.

(Full End)

A heavy-armed attack was made against the Malisevo Police Station last night at 07:20 PM CET. Media Centar was informed.

No casualties were reported among the police.

Heavy-armed groups of Albanian extremists attacked the police station using mortars, bazookas and automatic weapons. Four mortar projectiles have hit and damaged the police building. A police off-road vehicle was also damaged.

The police fired back and the attackers withdrew.

(Full End)

Here in Kosovo, would you say that many Serbs are against you, or not so many?

I think it's not really ordinary people. I have Serbian friends, and my atelier is all surrounded by Serbs. I think it's basically the regime in Beograd. You know that very well, added, gazing pointedly at Vineta.

His wife brought us all Coca-Colas.

Wherever you sit in a cafe, everybody's discussing the war, he remarked, gesturing with his unlit cigarette.

When you say the war, what do you mean?

I mean what is happening here.³³ What I'm talking about is all the women and children, not to mention the familiar case of the seven-year-old child who received a bullet in his mouth. You see, I'm shaking when I say this.

(You know what? Vineta had said about the strife in Kosovo. I don't understand why those journalists don't feel humiliated to eat a whole plate of Albanian shit. Me,

if I have to eat one bite, all right, but this is fuckin' *disgusting*. —And the police chief of Priluzje said: All these people there are simply poisoned by the idea of Greater Albania, from three years old to a hundred and three years old. Why that is, I don't know.)

Professor, I asked, would the limited autonomy of the Tito days be enough for you now, or would you require full independence?

Since we've been really badly treated for the last twenty years,³⁴ independence is the only solution.

Do you support the KLA?

Çavardasha smiled and hesitated. His family looked on, murmuring anxiously.

Basically, he replied carefully, the KLA was formed by *the people* as a reaction to the first massacres of Albanian civilians. I was in Moscow Hospital at the time. I'll never forget how I felt...

ANOTHER DIGRESSION: THE MURDERED POLICEMEN

So he had declared himself. I respected his courage. The next step was to apply the litmus test of the two murdered cops. Why not write their names? After all, they keep coming up in this story (and I may as well mention that during the brief time I was in Kosovo, several other Serbian policemen also disappeared or were seriously wounded in guerrilla attacks).³⁵ Ilya Vujosevic, then forty-eight years old, and his twenty-four-year-old colleague Dejan Djatlov, both Serbs, were kidnapped and then machine-gunned to death. International news reports said cautiously that their corpses "bore signs of torture." Vineta and Petar were sitting in Priluzje drinking up the doctor's slivovitz when that tale came up in the conversation. About one of the murdered men the doctor said: His jaw was removed, and every bone was broken. He got seven bullets in the back. Every organ was injured. He was shot by dum-dum bullets. I saw in the photo with my own eyes. His eyes were cut out; his ears were cut off...

Vineta had leaned forward, I thought at first merely out of weary disgust, and then I saw that she was weeping. —I'm sorry, I'm sorry, she sobbed. It's just that my little brother's only nineteen and he—he wants to join up and help save Kosovo...

In Albania I asked a KLA man about those policemen. He insisted that their deaths were sheer Serbian propaganda. I told him that their eyes had allegedly been gouged out, and he explained that Serbs would do anything for effect.

And on that drive to Glavotina, when a devout-looking KLA soldier jumped into the jeep beside us, I said to Arguriana: Ask his opinion about what happened to those two Serbian policemen.

I know what he thinks, said Arguriana with her trademark smile.

Well, ask him anyway.

He says they killed two of his friends.

11 November, 1998

Media Center
Pristina

12:15 PM CET

Three policemen were badly wounded yesterday evening in an attack made by Albanian extremists at 07:00 PM CET

The policemen wounded are as follows: Veljko Mentic from Negotin, and conscripts Slavko Amidzic and Sasa Stefanovic from Kosovo Polje.

The policemen wounded were transported to the Pristina Clinical - Hospital Center, and have undergone surgical treatment. According to the surgeon statement, their lives are not endangered

The Albanian extremists attacked the police station and its other facilities in Glogovac using mortars, bazookas and automatic weapons. The police facilities underwent significant damages.

The police fired back and after an hour of fighting, they repulsed the attack.

The search after the attackers is underway.

(Full End)

Those two police in particular, or others?

The Albanian girl shrugged.

Why did they have to torture them?

It's the same, she said indifferently, not translating the question for the KLA man, who was already glaring at me. Brute that I was, I'd cast doubt on the sanctity of his organization. —They do it to us, and we do it to them. It's war.

THE RIDDLE'S ANSWER

So I leaned forward there in Çavardasha's house, fixed my eyes on the sculptor, and asked him: When the KLA kills Serbian police, is that justified or not?

I think it's not, Çavardasha replied. But I can say that I don't know how I'd react if one of my children were massacred...

THE AVENGERS OF KOSOVO

Remembering those back roads where men in KLA uniforms strode about by day so freely (a new recruit ran casually into a house to get his weapon, then sat beside me with his antique six-shooter and his Russian rifle, pointing gloomily at destroyed houses in the rain), remembering also the fact that not a single Albanian I met in the province would now settle for anything less than independence, remembering how the tense young doctor in Priluzje had leaned forward when he began to tell his own war stories as a police reservist, and how he'd said: What I could see with my own eyes was a police tank and a KLA guy standing in the middle of the street with an automatic rifle, shooting at the tank. What kind of people do that? What kind of fanatics?—remembering, too, that international opinion went against the Serbs, I said to Vineta and Petar: I'm sorry, but I think you're going to lose Kosovo.

I think so, too, Vineta whispered despondently.

Who knows, she remarked to the Albanian girl with bright bitterness, maybe next time Bill comes here I'll need a passport to go to Pristina.

Arguriana shrugged and smiled.³⁶

Sadness was hardly the only emotion Vineta felt. —*They will see what a Serbian rage is like*, she had said. —And the director of the media center in the Grand Hotel in Pristina (a Serb, of course) told me: If we really get fed up, the whole world can bomb us, and we won't care. —He was also the man who aphorised: *A person without history is not a person.*

He was right, although I remain unconvinced that the vacuous unpersonhood of my fellow Americans is utterly inferior to the full fledged humanity of Balkan types who kill each other for politics. What is history? Go to the monument at Kosovo where in 1389 Prince Lazar, the Serbian leader, was captured in battle and executed by the Turks.³⁷ In one eighteenth-century painting of unknown provenance, Lazar, whom Vineta calls not prince but emperor, resembles a king from a deck of playing cards come alive, with sad dark eyes. (He was not a good man, a KLA recruit predictably told me, because he took Albanian land.) After the battle he lost, Serbia became a vassal state for centuries. But perhaps, as the famous Serbian poem about him runs, "The Tsar chose a heavenly kingdom, / And not an earthly kingdom."³⁸ When I was in Albania, some the KLA cadres I interviewed pretended never to have heard of Lazar and his death; the others merely said they'd never visited the monument. Were they a people without history? Not at all. They had their own battle of Kosovo to invoke; their hero, Skanderbeg, had also lost to the Turks... But let's remain with the Serbs for now. The old marketwomen in Beograd might have never been to Kosovo, but they'd all traveled there in their hearts. One old lady who was selling ribbons personalized with Cyrillic proper names shook her fist at me upon learning my nationality, crying: You Americans have no souls! You're only about

money. But in heaven we'll all be equal. —Then she relented a little as she peered at me and said: Ah, well, you're young. It's not your fault. But we Serbs have souls. In Kosovo there's a flower that grows in the fields, a red, red flower that's so beautiful. It's red from all the blood of Serbs who died for our freedom.³⁹ Prince Lazar died for you. He saved Europe from the Muslims.⁴⁰ But you don't care.

Who's Serbia's best friend and who's her worst enemy? I asked the old woman.

We have no friends, she replied calmly. Our enemy is your big money. But someday we will have our revenge.

I've asked: What is history? Go to Kosovo battlefield. Vineta, Petar and I visited the tower on a cold and overcast day of bitter winds. Vineta told me how an Albanian caretaker had been caught pissing on the monument a few years back. How did she know it was he? Because Serbs wouldn't do it, so it must have been some Albanian, so it was probably that man. She read out for me the words of Prince Lazar to his allies and vassals: *Whoever fails to come to Kosovo and is of Serbian stock, let him get no progeny of woman, let him have neither red wine nor white wheat; let him rust.* A busload of military police had just arrived. Off duty but in uniform, wearing their guns and knives, the men ascended the monument to gaze down at the land's wet green darkness and faraway mountains, with the smoke from the power plant massing on the horizon in a disgusting cloud, and a guide explained to them how the battle had gone while they earnestly listened, with their hands bunkered in their pockets against the cold. They would not let me photograph them at first, because I was American, but when Vineta entered the picture in order to help me, then they were happy. History—in the sense that the media center's director meant the term—is largely pictures. This photograph of Vineta and the Serbian police might be unfairly, propagandistically captioned by some American periodical to prove something about Serbian militarism, and then it would be history, wouldn't it? I took another photograph of Vineta by one of the new concrete pillars which were inscribed with the dates 1389-1989. 1989 was the date of Milosevic's famous speech promising to safeguard the rights of Serbs. He delivered it here, on the exact anniversary of Lazar's defeat. Many have blamed that speech for unleashing the poisonous nationalism which broke up Yugoslavia. (All the KLA cadres I interviewed remembered Milosevic's words quite well. They said: He prepared to take our land.) Be that as it may, Kosovo remains, as Misa said to me, Jerusalem. —Personally, I don't want it to be lost, another Beograd Serb told me. It took centuries to take it back. We're already ruined in a way, but to lose it would be terrible.

When the police chief of Priluzje came to join us at the schoolteacher's kitchen with the clean white stove and the shiny black stovepipe, I asked: Officer, when you were a small child, did they take you to the battlefield of Kosovo?

Two or three times, he replied in his surprisingly melodious voice. The school organized it.

If Serbia lost Kosovo, what would you do?

The schoolteacher's old mother interrupted with a shout: Never! We'll always stay here! We'll never lose Kosovo!

And what do you think, officer?

Well, said the police chief with a quiet smile, my answer is the same.

And Zoran Kostic, the camouflage-trousered President of Priluzje, said to me: We respect the Milosevic-Holbrooke Agreement. But the other side doesn't respect it. If they continue not to respect it, we shall organize ourselves to guard the village as before. We've demobilized our paramilitary units. We can remobilize them. —In other words, his answer was also the same.

The old lady was still shouting: Kosovo has always been a Serbian land. Our ancient monasteries prove that. The Americans want this to be Albanian land now. That'll be the day! For the last fifty years, Albanian immigrants have been moving in to take our land. They won't get it. That'll be the day!

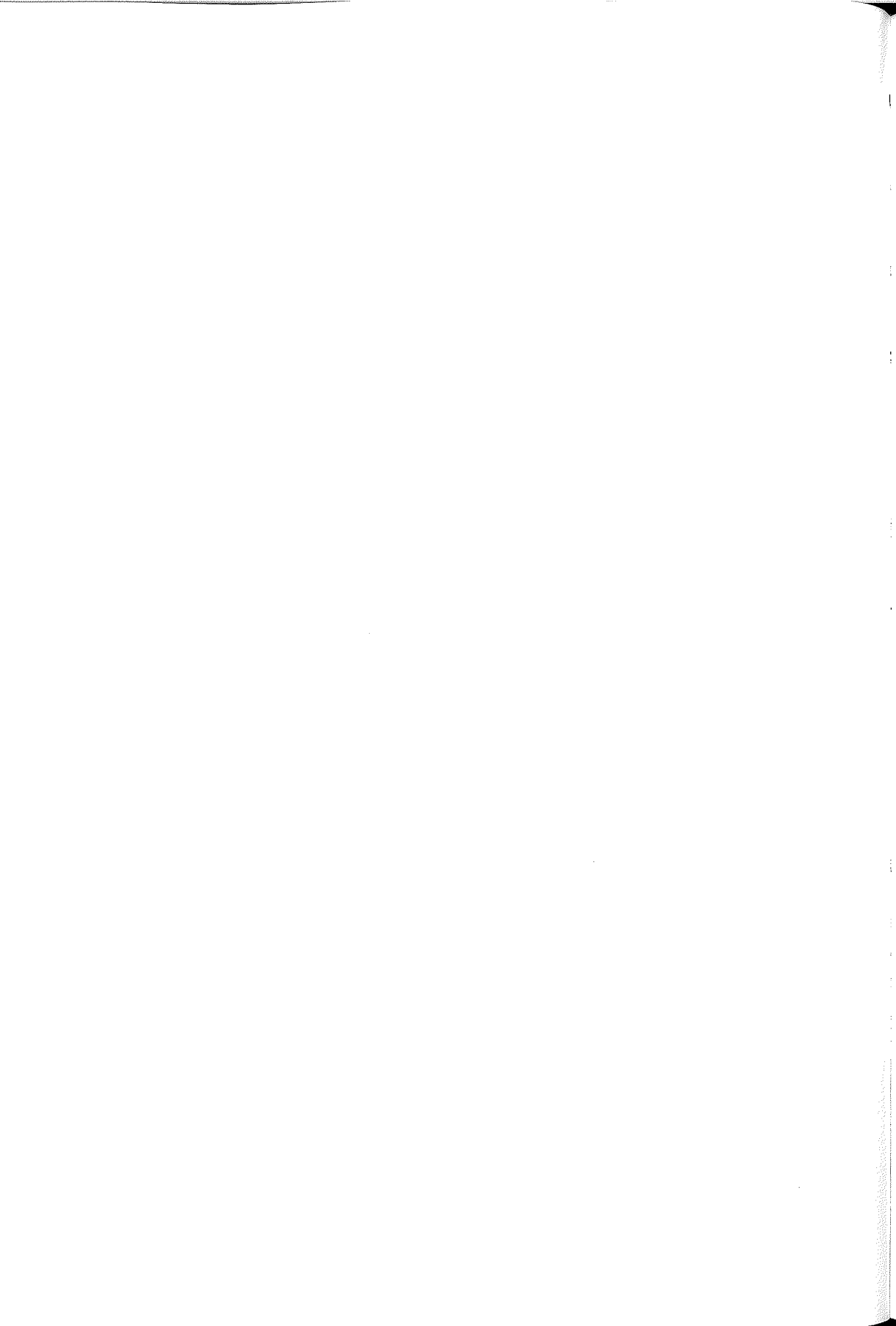
You can't understand how I feel! Vineta said to me again and again. And I can't understand why you can't understand. When I come to Kosovo, I feel anxious and concerned and—and... *I love this land.* But you Americans, you're nobodies, just a bunch of all races mixing together who call yourselves a nation. That's too abstract for me.

What is history? If you weary of Kosovo, go to the National Museum in Beograd, which inculcates nationalism even in its display of ROMAN POTTERY ON OUR SOIL: *After conquering our lands, Roman colonizers... could not be satisfied with the local, autochthonous pottery...* Well, I couldn't blame the curators for that caption. Nobody likes to have his country occupied. (I remembered the KLA man who claimed that Kosovo had lain under enemy occupation since 1912. To the Serbs, 1912 was the year of Kosovo's liberation.) And so I wandered upstairs, browsing among Serbian and Montenegrin paintings, and then on the wall, with an eerie shudder, I saw a disk of dark bronze from 1912 on which kneeling, Greek-bearded figures, their heads bowed, faced each other across a plain of spears. Towering over them—who was he?—I spied a figure, a combination of double-plaited Greek warrior and of Christ. He stood with his arms outstretched as if in crucifixion, and in each hand he held a laurel wreath. Behind him, in shapes which ironically resembled the mushroom-shaped bunkers I'd seen in Albania, grew the cross-domed towers of an Orthodox church. Was he Prince Lazar? Maybe he was the *next* Prince Lazar. His face was sad, and his patience was endless. The title: *To the Avengers of Kosovo.*⁴¹

POSTSCRIPT

In the autumn of 2001 I happened to meet an Albanian Kosovar from Pristina, whose mother was running for president of a Kosovo now more or less detached from Serbia in 1999, thanks to the good offices of NATO. When I asked him what had happened to the people in Priluzje and Glavotina, he claimed not to know those

Serbian place-names, which, since Priluzje and Glavotina were perhaps twenty minutes by car from the center of Pristina, I doubted. Still hoping to learn something from him, I said that I was worried about the fate of the inhabitants of those villages. He smiled. He said: The Serbs are really something. You might even like them if you didn't know them.



AFRICA

The Jealous Ones (1994)

Special Tax (2001)



INTRODUCTION

Had some accident taken me to South Africa and Morocco instead of Madagascar and the Congo, I don't doubt that the case studies here would convey a very different feeling. The notion of picking *any* two countries from the continent, and calling the result "Africa," is far more unfair than pretending that Yugoslavia with its history of violently shifting borders represents Europe—which it does. In short, the "Africa" I have selected (or which circumstances have selected for me) cannot be "the real Africa,"¹ but it may illuminate aspects of that Africa.

Talk about ancientness! It's said that the human race was born in Africa. The complexities of Balkan tribalism stretch back beyond 1389; but the kingdoms, customs and tribes which have come and gone in Africa extend beyond comprehension. All the same, you'll find little history in my African case studies. The reason is that the violence I studied in both countries tended to found itself on such imminent desperation (and despair) that the grievances of the dead approach irrelevance.

An occasional exception is ethnic violence. In the case of the Congo, the stink of Rwandan genocide hangs over the rebel-controlled area along the eastern border—and here is a good place to remind you that I will be describing two Congos: a republic to the west of the Congo River, and a "democratic" republic to the east, which was rather recently still known as Zaire; each of these nations in turn consists of a government-held zone and an area dominated by one or more insurgent factions.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the clashing groups each known as the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) are stiffened, and some people say commanded, by Rwandan troops. (You will meet the figurehead president of the larger RCD group.) Just across the frontier, in Rwanda itself, members of the Hutus tribe murdered Rwandan Tutsis, and *vice versa*—defense of race, of course. In each case, the killers pursued their victims into the Congolese jungle. And violence is infectious. Like the region once called Yugoslavia, the two Congos have seen their own borders and peoples migrate over the centuries. Thus many Congolese in the RCD zone are themselves Hutus and Tutsis. They hunker down in their huts, wondering when comparable tribal violence may break out among them.

But this fear constitutes a luxury, because it fails the test of imminence. Go westwards into government territory. In Kinshasa, official capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is as common as it is heartbreaking to see two women fighting over a rotten mango in the marketplace. Much of the food supply lies in RCD hands. A car comes, and people will come running out of nowhere to beg or demand a ride on it, because wherever it's going, the destination may be better than here. (From a balcony, they resemble ants swarming on a sugar cube.) Meanwhile, unwashed policemen, whose only claim to authority is their guns, shake down whomever they can, beat prisoners, threaten and extort; *everyone* extorts. In RCD territory, they might extort away your car or your daughter.

In the other Congo, whose capital is Brazzaville, people may be less hungry, but they remain no less ready to plead or threaten. The houses of Brazzaville are bullet-pocked from various civil wars. Government is weak, so crime is strong.

Both Congos teach me this lesson: Where there is no decent, legitimate, reasonably potent authority, the social contract remains incomplete.

When is defense of class justified? It would be difficult not to wish the people well in endeavoring to overthrow the weak and rotten authority which afflicts them with its "special taxes." But who or what would be better?

Sadism and expediency play their ghastly part in both Congos (just watch a skinny young fruit thief get kicked and beaten in a prison); so do compulsion, loyalty and fear. What precisely *is* compulsion? When does the extortionist lose his justification of imminent necessity? We enter the bullet-holed apartment of an official in Kinshasa. Of course he takes bribes. "I'm inspector of immigration; I'm a big person. And look at me," he says. "Look at this." He has a wife, a baby, and an existence which you or I might consider unendurable. Does this justify him in extorting "special taxes" from anyone in his power? All his colleagues think so. What constitutes necessity to you?

In Madagascar, authority is even weaker, and the street criminals and cattle rustlers proportionately stronger. Meet the woman who stabbed a pregnant lady in the belly so that she could sell the victim's clothing; meet the mother-and-son team of knife-wielding robbers. Enter a prison, where people starve to death if their rel-

atives don't bring food or money. Look at the portfolio of beggar-women² and note how pitiful they are; one poor old lady told me that she had been hungry as long as she could remember.

Here everything feels *personalized*. Every day, face-to-face social contracts get enacted between the haves and the have-nots. Whereas in the Congo a policeman will take you into a hot dark stinking room and run his hands over you, determined by virtue of his authority, which constitutes nothing but superior force, to rob you of everything he can, in Madagascar a beggar will approach you and calmly express his expectation of receiving, not everything, just something, an amount varying between reasonable and unreasonable; if you give it to him, he will be satisfied; if you refuse, he will become, as they constantly say there, "jealous," and he will stab you if he can. There is a strange fairness to it all, although it never ceased unnerving me. To be sure, in Madagascar you can also meet the predators who operate outside the social contract; they'll follow you in packs and start to flank you; if you don't get away fast, you're done. But these men and women constitute a recurring exception to the rule of pay-as-you-go, pay a little bit every day and you'll be allowed to live until tomorrow; to each one of us who lives within a social contract, which is to say most men and women on this earth, the procedure will feel surprisingly familiar.



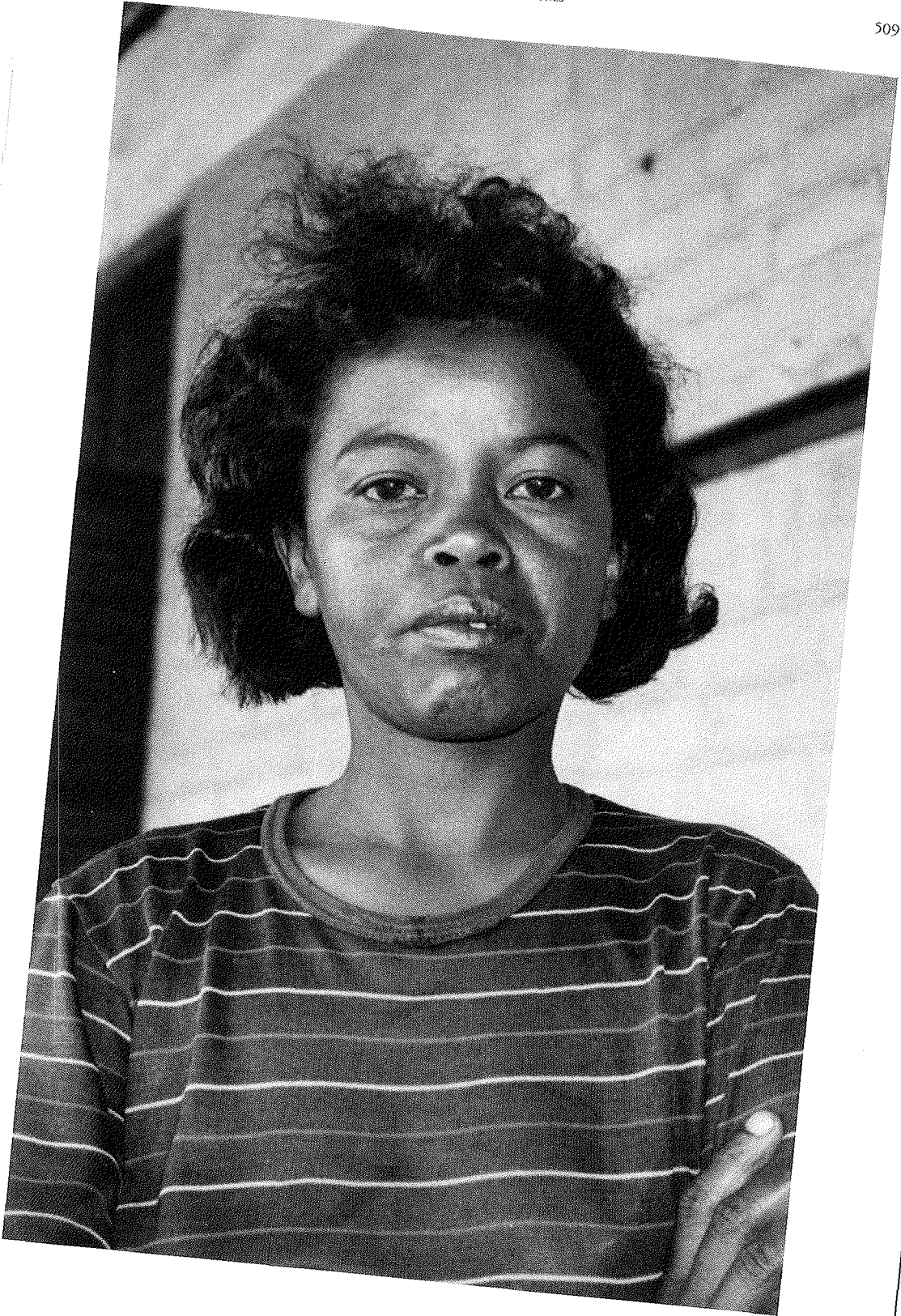
THE JEALOUS ONES

MADAGASCAR, 1994

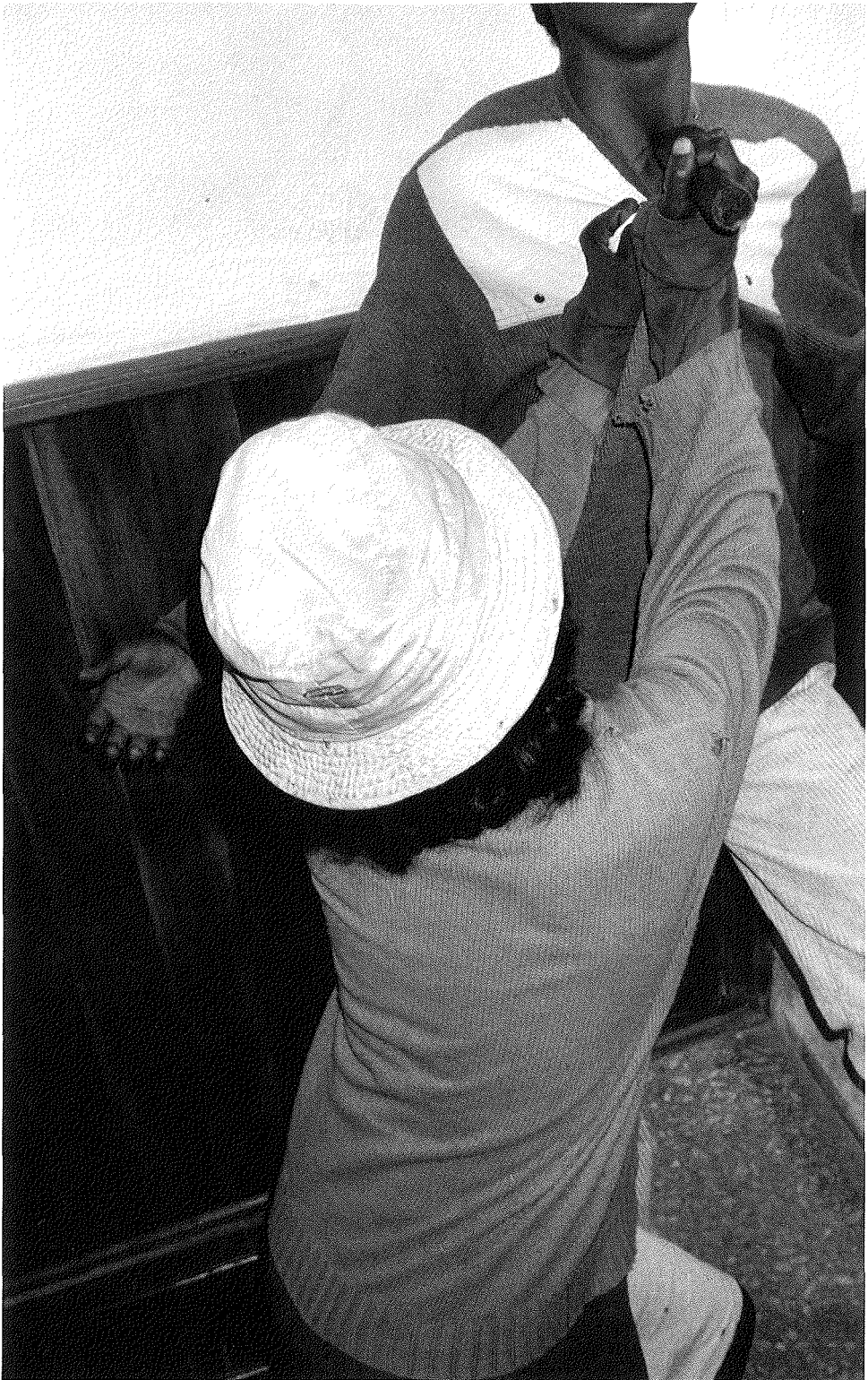
The violence here tends to be that of the have-nots against the haves and hence is class-based. What makes it so heartrending is that even the haves possess almost nothing.

509. "Madame Dracula," Antananarivo.
510. Madame Dracula with the knife she preferred for street robbery.
511. Madame Dracula demonstrating how to kill. The pretended victim was her son. They both offered to kill somebody for my edification, but I thought that this simulation was adequate.
512. Her son showing how to *faire la position*.
513. Robber-murderess, Antananarivo. She paid off the police so that she didn't have to serve her sentence.
514. Merchant at a market known for its stolen zebu, near Tulear.
515. A shaman near Tulear, with one of his wives and one of his zebu. For many Malagasy tribes, the zebu is the emblem of wealth, honor, and even post-mortem success.
- 516a. A crew of zebu rustlers some distance north of Tulear. The bracelets and scarification are magic charms. I learned from my interpreter that they planned to rob and kill me, but I left town first.
- 516b. The same people, staging an ambush for my camera. They offered to steal a zebu for me; it seemed not only more ethical but also safer to insist on a "reenactment."
- 517a. A simulated zebu raid.
- 517b. This zebu thief (who was also a shaman) needed to disguise the appearance of a zebu. Hot sand flung on its black fur would scorch it white.

- 518a. Madame Dracula couldn't understand my finicky preference for enactments in place of the real thing, but for a little cash she obliged. This was a purse-snatching. She began by lurking in a doorway, ready to dart inside to safety if need be. Then, when she'd chosen her victim, she came up behind her, but not close enough to risk being grabbed. The trick was to lunge forward with the upper body only, bending sharply at the waist and stretching out the hands, then yanking the purse backwards as Madame Dracula's body snapped upright.
- 518b. Should the victim put up a fuss, Madame Dracula was more than ready to assume a threatening stance. She didn't use the knife unless she had to.
- 519a. Street urchins at twilight, Antananarivo. A few seconds after I took this photograph, the second boy from the right tried to stab me, "to cut your money out of you," as he later explained.
- 519b. Victim of a violent robbery, Antananarivo. This man was lying entirely neglected in the hospital until I gave the doctor money for medicine. We accordingly see the physician in the background, dispensing energetic tenderness, but I wonder if that poor old man ever got his medicine.



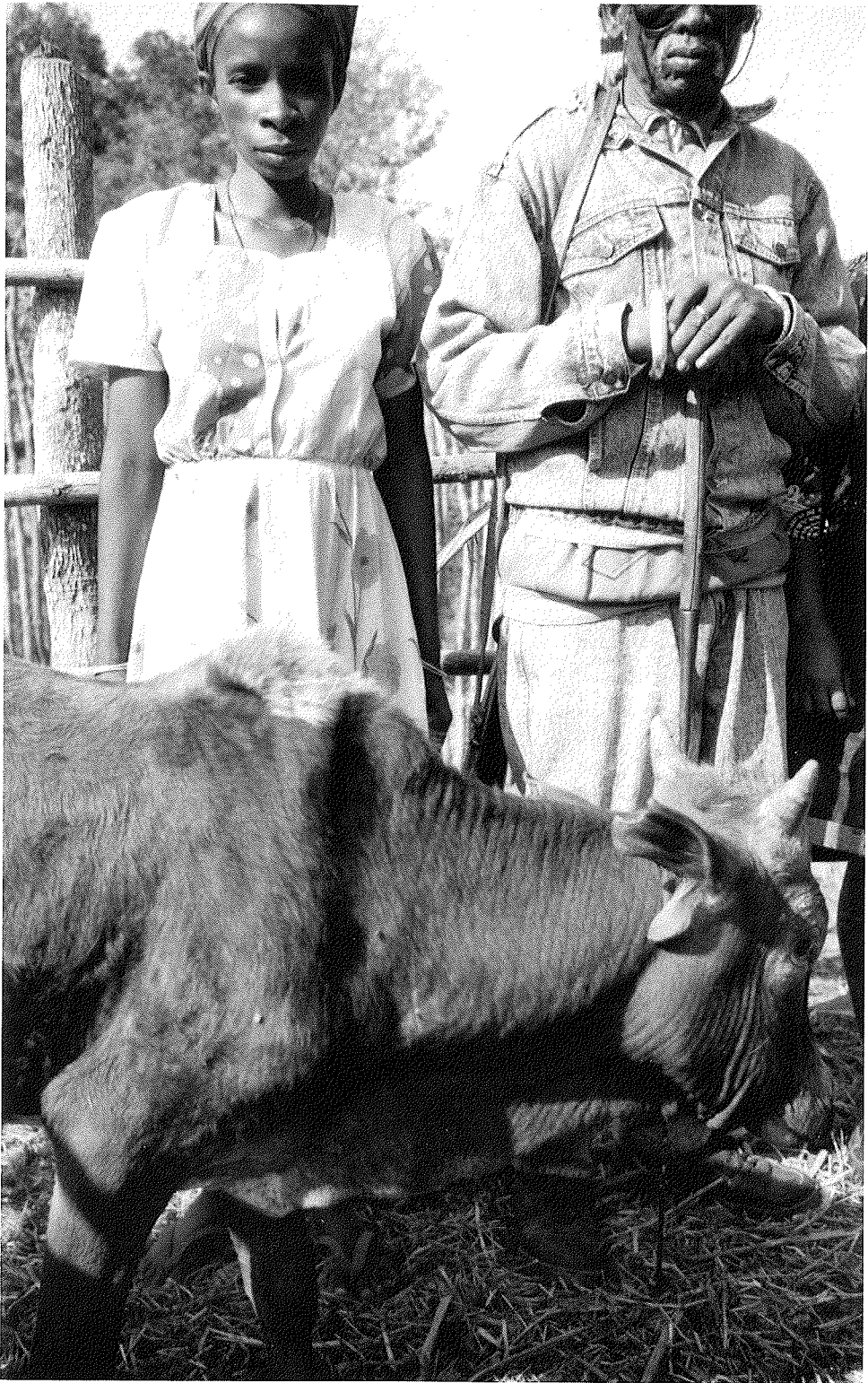








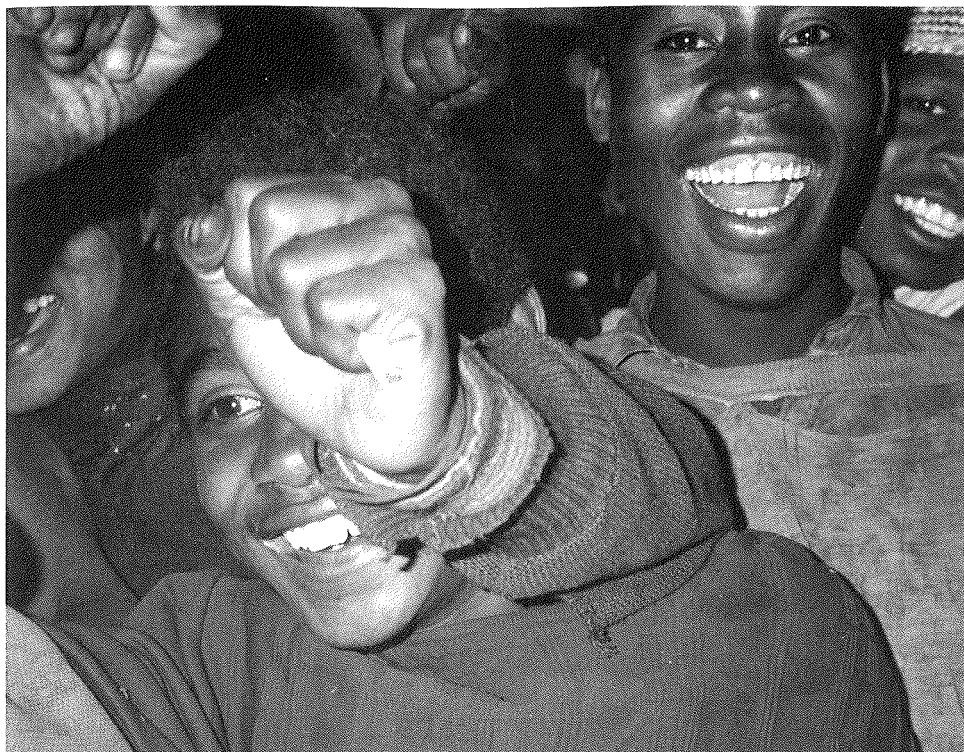


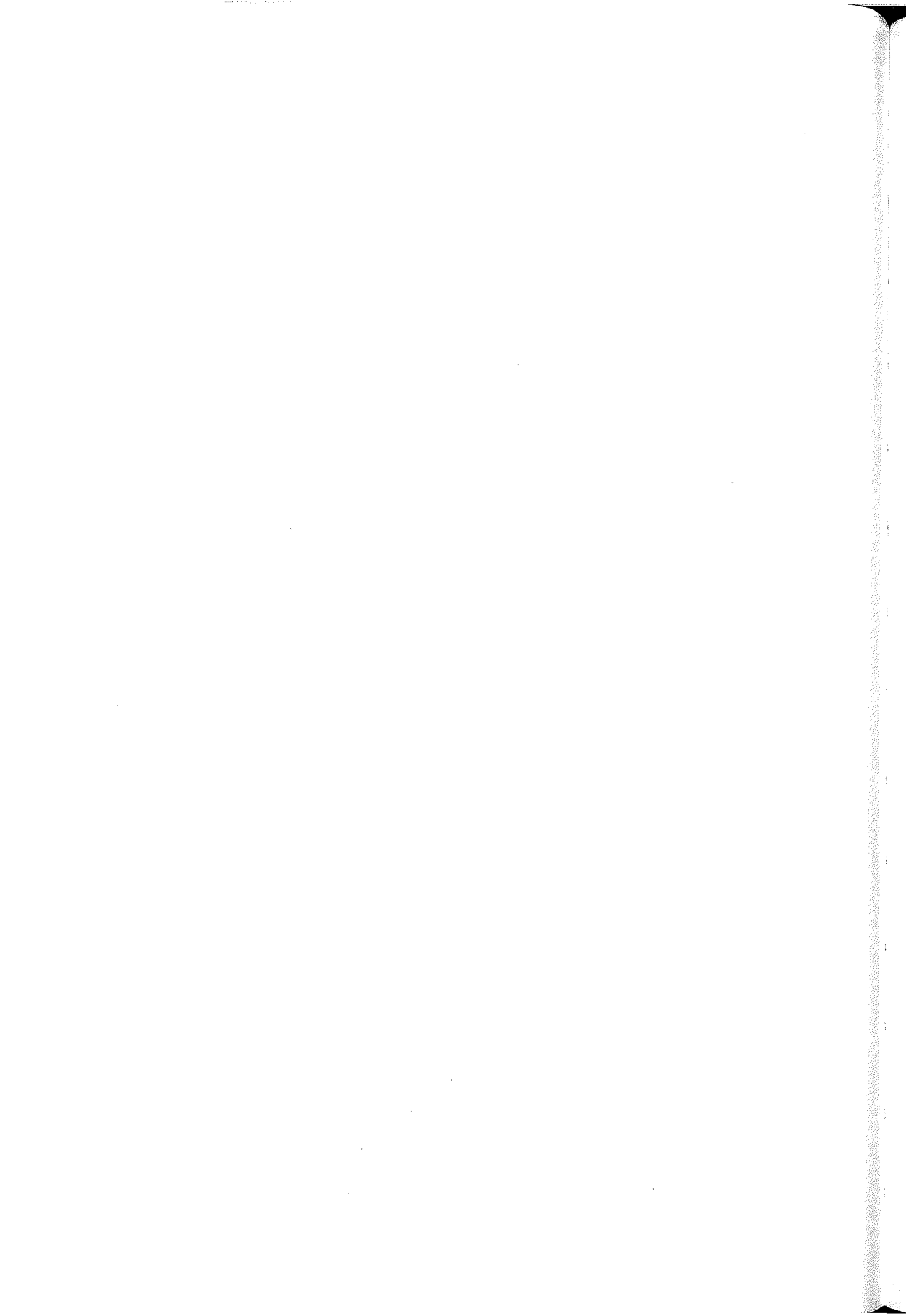












THE JEALOUS ONES

(1994)

NOTE: *Some of the names in this story have been changed.*

O. is very jealous. When she introduced me to her best friend Mignonne, O. asked if I would please buy Mignonne and all the other business girls in that disco a drink, and I wanted to be nice and said that I would. After all, the business girls expected it, being her best friends; what girl wouldn't want to give her best friends something? Chubby chocolate-colored O. was very proud and happy that night because after two years I'd come back to her, which she'd never believed I'd do; and since she was happy she had to give the others something or else they would be jealous. Every time O. receives a letter from me she must pay the post office 1,500 Malagasy francs¹ or the official there will be jealous and never give her the next one. When O. and I went to see if her Croatian husband had sent her anything interesting, the clerk grinned happily at me and inquired if I were the American husband and O. allowed that I was. The clerk congratulated her. Then O. took my hand: —He speak me, me very happy my darling come so far, so must give small present. Please, *mon amour*, give five thousand. If no give, him small *jaloux*. —So I figured that an equivalent Law of Small Presents must apply in regard to Mignonne, who after all was O.'s best friend (last time Charlotte had been O.'s best friend but

after Charlotte's Belgian boyfriend had gone to the calaboose for two years for selling little girls to French tourists, Charlotte's character had changed for the worse, so O. said); and besides, Mignonne, just sixteen, was very slender from crying because her Italian boyfriend had not returned; in short, if O. wanted me to buy Mignonne a drink I'd buy her a drink: now that Madagascar had grown twice as poor, it was twice as cheap for me, so what did I care? The problem was that O. cared. Crouched at the center of her cunning spiderweb of social relations, she watched, tested, balanced and sometimes pounced. To keep Mignonne from being *jalouse*, O. was obligated to ask me to buy that beer of celebration. But when I agreed, meaning only to be a good and convivial soul, O. instantly became *jalouse* of Mignonne and me. —You like her? she hissed later, when we were alone back inside O.'s wooden house that sweltered and swarmed with moths and mosquitoes. —Sure I like her, I said. She's your best friend. —Me speak liar best friend! shouted O. in a rage at my stupidity. Me love her only with my mouth! Me understand her character very well—ha, ha, ha! She want fuck you. Why you no understand? You same baby—no understand nothing Madagascar! Every Malagasy only bad heart, speak liar, liar! Only me no bad heart. My darling Croatia better than you—not same you. Some girl want together drink him, he speak correct, speak her go away, stay only together with O. Oh, you not same like before. Me think you no love me! You have double triple heart; you no good.

So I learned that lesson; and a night or two later, when O. had invited Mignonne over so that I could paint her portrait, Mignonne spoke rapidly to O. in Malagasy and O. reported: She speak, please you bring her together with me, we three go to Tulear.

Oh, so she wants me to pay her way to Tulear? I said.

Yes, darling.

And what do you want, sweetheart? Do you want her company?

Up to you, said O., watching me narrowly.

Tell her I'm not a bank. Tell her I'm your husband, not hers.

O. relayed this to Mignonne, who smiled sourly. Soon afterward she left, wishing O. and me *bon voyage*.

Did I speak to her correctly? I asked.

Correct! O. glowed. If you bring her Tulear, then me small *jalouse*.

She put her arm around me—Me *jalouse* only because me love you, she whispered. If me no love you, me never *jalouse*.

That was how it was, and three weeks later in Antananarivo when O. had bought a used belt at the market for thirty-five thousand which she intended to sell to Mignonne for sixty, Mignonne herself appeared at the taxi-brousse station as I sat in a cab waiting for O. to buy her ticket home and meanwhile everything was turning blue and grey and black with diesel-smoke, in the midst of which my driver was happily smoking an unfiltered cigarette; and Mignonne rapped on the glass, want-

ing to come in and discuss old times beside me on the back seat, and she looked very beautiful but I spoke to her only through the glass until O. came rushing to hug her because they were best friends, O. actually a little cross because now Mignonne might understand Antananarivo prices, but on the other hand she could always sell the belt to some other business girl. As for my behavior, *correct!* she said. Me now understand you love me!

The problem, of course, was to keep Mignonne from being *jalouse* also. Had I simply refused to talk to her at all through that window, or had I never bought her that drink back at the disco, she might have hated me and quite possibly made up some lie to inflame O. against me, which would have been easy because beneath her facade of happy extroversion O. was a deeply bitter and suspicious woman. The only reason she'd become a business girl was because she needed to eat. Now twenty-eight, she was getting tired of sucking off old men for twenty dollars; she wanted to be married. —Everybody speak me: O., now you come old! she lamented. —The so-called husbands came and went (when I appeared at her doorstep, her little brother, who didn't remember me, said to her in French: *When do you finish with this one?*); and whereas before I'd felt that she genuinely loved me, this time meanness and cynicism were more in evidence—for which I couldn't blame her. After all, how many times is it possible to believe that you love someone just because he gives you money? And so O. had developed bad habits. She'd ask me to give her twenty-five thousand or a hundred thousand to pay for our hotel, then spend the money so that I had to pay twice, O. hanging her head, laughing half in triumph, half in shame: *Me steal your money, darling!* —She'd order expensive foods and not eat them. She'd tell me that she was going to wash our clothes (she used to say: *Darling, me alive, me have hands, you never pay money your pantalons clean good!*), and then hand the laundry to a chambermaid or a street girl, who'd soon enough present me with the bill. This is what naturally happens to business girls as they get old. The heart of gold is mined almost to death, and then the woman realizes that she must look to herself. So O. didn't trust people very much. Her jealousy was not only an expression of her love; it was also an instinct to protect what was rightfully hers. Since I belonged to her, so did my assets, and she didn't want Mignonne or Koko or any of her other best friends to get them.

O.'s kind of jealousy is peculiarly Malagasy.² Of course jealousy and dishonesty are essentials of the human apparatus. But the Malagasy seem to be more matter-of-fact about them than we. Everyone I ever met in Madagascar assumed that his interlocutor was lying whenever doing so would produce an advantage. That was just what one believed about others, and what one did oneself. And every criminal I met, decrying the windy, whining American approach (I did it because I was poor, because I was hungry, because I was "discriminated against," because no one would give me a break) said straight out and magnificently: *I did it because I was jealous.*

GETTING TO THE POINT

For me the omnipresence of crime in that country had been a slow discovery. Intoxicated by the emerald hills which bulged with young trees and palmheads like cabbages in a field, I'd wandered with my brushes and palette, painting pictures. I'd marveled at the zebu, those strangely hump-shouldered oxen that were the measure of wealth. —Be careful, darling, O. would say in a low voice. *Attention*, eh? Here is many Mafia. They take your dress, take your money, take your shoes, take everything! —It was to learn more about these "Mafia" (as well as to see her again) that I'd come back.

THE CAVE OF SKULLS

Although O. was born in Diego Suarez, which she refers to as "my country," for as long as I've known her she's lived in Tamatave, a port city on the east coast. Tamatave dreams in a hot sea of air below the yellow-green waves of tree-ocean. Sometimes it rains, and sometimes there are cyclones, but most of the time Tamatave is hot and sunny and still, with silent sweating barefoot *pousse-pousse* drivers pulling rich people down the wide and tree-lined boulevards. Business is good for O. there. Her mother knows what she does but doesn't want to see it (darling, explained O., Mama speak me: O., don't too much make business or maybe you get broken). Her father doesn't know. The foreign sailors are generous, Madagascar being cheap, and sometimes they'll even agree to wear condoms (O. believes that AIDS began when a white man in America had sex with a dog). So Tamatave is also her "country" now. O. can pick out a Tamatave girl anywhere, even if she's never seen her before in her life. Hence the letters which she sends me once or twice a month are postmarked Tamatave; and although O. can barely sign her name, the letters are almost fluent, sparkling as they do with such phrases as *I'm agog to hold you in my arms for all time* so from the very first I knew that O. must have hired a professional letter-writer.³ Upon my arrival she took me to meet this very intelligent fellow, whose name was Jaquelin, who had an ear for music, and who just happened to be her best friend. He lived with his wife and baby in a dirt-floored hut in the jungle. From the very first I disliked him. Jealousy was his disease. O. told me that sometimes when she wanted to write me she'd have been unlucky in the disco and so she'd try to get him to produce a letter on credit but he never would; she'd have to give him one of her dresses, or her new blanket, or a pair of shoes. From time to time one of her letters would entreat me to send her money. I had sent a bank draft twice; each time somebody at the bank in Tamatave had stolen it. Needless to say, O. thought that I had lied to her about sending the money (until I took her to the bank and proved it); and Jaquelin, who'd written the fundraising appeals, thought that O. was lying to him about not having received anything; business etiquette

demanded that he get a cut. As I write about him I can almost see him now, his eyes closed, his long, Indonesian looking face sucked tight against his skull as he sings his fire song, the pretty wife mouthing shyly, looking down at the words, which he's written with many cross-outs in a soiled notebook; and for a moment I almost like him; but then I remember that there are two kinds of jealousy, in keeping with the two kinds of moral positions: absolute and relative. Absolute jealousy is fairly tolerable. If I am absolutely jealous, I want only what is mine, what is coming to me, like a beggar expecting his ten cents. If I am relatively jealous, on the other hand, I want everything that other people have. Jaquelin's was of this latter type. He was, however, an excellent translator. He taught English, and on the wall of his house he'd written: ALL LESSONS MUST BE PAID IN ADVANCE.

Are any of your students in the Mafia? I asked him.

Well, I know many people, he said smugly.

What does the Mafia do around here?

Somebody told me they make illegally guns in a secret factory, without a serial number...

Would it be possible to see one of those guns?

I can ask.

Is the Mafia the same as the Dahalo?

No. What O. calls Mafia means only pickpockets and violent thieves; in the Malagasy language we use the word *mpangerapoussy*⁴. The Dahalo are in the south. They are bandits. They kill people, rob taxi-brousses, steal zebu.

Do you know anyone who's met the Dahalo?

I have one student who works in the shipyard, and of course I can translate for you, said Jaquelin, gazing greedily into my eyes while in the mosquito-ridden darkness his wife in a dress like a dirty sandbag slopped out one brown breast and milked it into the baby's mouth, watching me and hoping for money; and O. smiled and pretended that everybody was her best friend; and I could already see that however much I paid Jaquelin he'd be angry and disappointed.

The next day we came back and the shipyard worker was waiting. He told me the tale of the cave of skulls.

In 1982 I was a soldier, he began. And we were sent to destroy a group of Dahalo. To the east of Tulear there is a village which can be reached only by three days' walking. The name of this village is ———. And two kilometers south of this village there is a cave. The Dahalo lived inside, in houses that they made of grass and mud. There were about fifty of them. They had a leader, an old man named A., and they also had a sorcerer to make Malagasy medicine. Whenever they decided to raid a village, the sorcerer would perform his magic, give them powder, and then no harm could come to them. The old man always stayed inside the cave but he'd tell them where to go. They'd come to a village armed with knives and axes and *pisto-*

lets and take whatever they wanted. They'd take zebu, gold, clothes, everything. Anybody who resisted would be killed. If someone dared to go to the police, that person would be killed.

The shipyard worker took a deep breath. —They brought us in by air, he said. From the beginning the Dahalo were ready for us. Within the cave were many tunnels, and within each tunnel they had men stationed. In my tunnel I was the only survivor. All these tunnels went down deep, and then met in a pit where the Dahalo had impaled many skulls on sticks. It was very difficult—oh, difficult, I tell you! Well, finally we killed some and captured the rest, including the old man. Beyond the skulls they had their treasure.

What kind of treasure?

Oh, everything! Gold, blue jeans, radios; and in another place they kept their stolen zebu...

And what happened?

We turned them over to the local police. And each time the police would ask a Dahal his name, the Dahal would answer: My name is Fifty Thousand.⁵—That was how much he had ready to give the police, you see. They always keep that amount ready in case they are captured. So the police let them all go.

“THEY WILL CUT OFF YOUR EAR”

It was hard for me to believe this story. It seemed like something out of H. Rider Haggard. I would not have been surprised if I'd learned that Jaquelin and the shipyard worker had sat down together to cook up the tallest tale they could, in order to get more money out of me. I wanted to hear more. So I asked O. to take me to the Tamatave jail.

O. had been in the calaboose herself one time when she and some other girls went without papers to a ship, in order to make a little business, and the gendarmes caught them. O. was locked into a cell with eight other girls. She told me that the floor was an open sewer. She cried and cried. Fortunately the sailor she'd made into her boyfriend was a decent soul. He paid thirty thousand, and after a week or so she came before the tribunal, where they bawled her out and let her go. The other girls all got six months. O. never visited them. She was too afraid. She avoided them after they got out, in case they might be jealous.

In Madagascar, the situation in jails is Darwinian. If you have big money, as O. did, you can get out. If you have small money you can go out for the day and maybe work enough to eat a good meal. If you have a family or somebody who cares about you, you'll be brought food. If not, you may get sick and hungry.

Passing through the waist-high gate into the smelly tunnel that led to the dirt courtyard, we met O.'s best friend, a business girl who'd lost her looks and so perforce had stolen something. She was very skinny. O. told me to give her ten thousand

for food, which I did. She kissed me a thank you, while O. turned away, pretending not to be jealous. Then we were led into the presence of the *gardien chef de prison*.

The *gardien chef* said that an interview with any prisoner would be impossible, but when I expressed my respect for the Law of Small Presents, he offered to bring a convict home that afternoon so that we could do the business there. O. and her best friend Koko and I ate lunch at one of the best Chinese restaurants I've ever been to, my chop suey a melange of fresh jungle vegetables and just-killed chicken, with no rice, but instead crunchy *frites* as thin as toothpicks, fried in peanut oil. (A boy twisted his neck into a line of tendons, his round white eyes smiling in his chocolate face, dirty white sweater, dirty white hands. He leaned on his own shoulder, smiling hopefully into the restaurant. O. gave him all our table's bread.) Koko thanked O. for the meal because I was, after all, not the guiding intelligence, only the moneybanks; and then we got Jaquelin and rendezvoused at the *gardien chef's* house.

The *gardien chef* lived in a neighborhood of shacks upon urine-reeking dirt. He had covered the inner walls of his home with transparent plastic to keep out some of the mosquitoes, so the place was like a greenhouse, and we all sat sweating. O. ran out to buy some rum, and Jaquelin gazed at me with an angry gloomy face.

What are you thinking about? I asked him.

I'm thinking of a word.

What word is that?

Miscegenation.

Ah, I said. Are you thinking of O. and me?

He nodded.

Well, you know, Jaquelin, miscegenation is not a very nice word. I'm surprised at you. I understand you've made a bit of money out of O.'s letters to me, so I'd think you'd appreciate miscegenation more. Anyhow, didn't you tell me your wife is from a different tribe than you.

Yes. My family did not want to accept her. I myself did not accept her, of course, until she gave up her spiritualist beliefs and became a good Catholic.

See you in Heaven, Jaquelin, I said.

Now O. was back, and the young convict sat waiting, a dark bold personable roundheaded man with an alert face; obviously he was not hungry; obviously he had connections; and the *chef de prison* nodded, and Jaquelin began to translate as the convict said:

In the south where I come from, we are Bara. That is our tribe. A man of the Bara race is not a man until he steals a zebu. No woman will marry him. There are two kinds of zebu stealers. The first is called Malaso. The Malas operate in small groups, usually five to seven. They come by night. Because their numbers are small, they do not fight when they are pursued. They kill only if the owner of the zebu discovers them in the act of theft, when the owner is alone. Dahalo are more dangerous. They work in groups of about thirty-five. Of these only about five are the real

Dahalo. The rest are men who know each other from different villages. Where I live, the villages are small, so nobody has any secrets. If somebody from one village is rich with zebu, a man from a second village will contact his friends from the third and the fourth, and then the Dahalo come to help them. The Dahalo bring knives, axes, *pistolets*, sometimes even Kalashnikovs. And they always have an old man to lead them and a sorcerer to make the Malagasy medicine. Sometimes they attack entire villages. They come in the middle of the afternoon, when most men are away in the fields, or else in the middle of the night, when people cannot react quickly. Somebody blows a whistle, and somebody else shoots a gun three times, and then the people from the village become afraid because they know that the attack is about to begin. They take everything. And sometimes people in the village who are not Dahalo use the occasion to murder their enemies in the confusion. Then the Dahalo go quickly, quickly, and the people rarely follow because they are afraid. If they do follow, the Dahalo fight back. Then the Dahalo split up into three groups. One group stays with the zebu and brings them to a trafficker, who buys them for a very cheap price. The second group watches for further pursuit. The third group spies out new villages along the way, to find more riches.

Are the zebu branded? I asked.

Sometimes. Sometimes not, because the owner of a zebu can tell his animals by their footprints. They walk differently if they live in a rocky place than if they live in a sandy place. He knows them by color and by smell, because to a real man zebu are everything.

So you are a real man?

He smiled proudly.

And you have stolen zebu?

He smiled again, and the *chef de prison* said: He is a thief. Why else would he be here?

So where should I go to meet the Dahalo?

To the south. You can try a town called S., on the way to Tulear. There is a big zebu market. The Dahalo often come there.

Is it dangerous?

They will welcome you. However, if you ask too many questions, they will cut off your ear.

That's nice.

It is our tradition. It is a way of warning strangers.

Oh, I see. And what happens if I keep asking questions?

First they will cut off your other ear. Then they will cut off your fingers one by one. Finally, if you persist, they will kill you.

I was wondering when they'd get to that, I said.

Jaquelin advised me to give the *chef de prison* and the convict five thousand apiece, so I gave them each ten and they smiled with joy and he sulked gloomily. At the end of the day I gave him twenty-five and he was insulted.

WHY ZEBU ARE EVERYTHING

O. herself, although she sometimes had to sell her clothes in order to eat, could never be considered poor, because with the money that one of her foreign husbands had given her she'd long ago bought a zebu, which her Mama kept with three others in Diego Suarez.

And if you had two zebu instead of one, would you be considered rich? I asked.

Oh, yes, *rich, rich, rich!* O. gushed, grinning at the thought of having another zebu.

Why are zebu so important in Madagascar?

No, you never understand, never listen me, never believe me! cried O. in disgust. Why you same same baby? Zebu is *everything!*

How do you mean, everything?

If you marry me, must pay my Papa one zebu. If you fuck another girl, me no understand, no problem. If me understand you fuck another girl, then you must buy me one zebu, then no problem. You no buy me zebu, me never stay with you. Zebu is for eat. Zebu is for money. Zebu is for dead. Now in Tamatave everybody speak, O. no good, only business girl, no nothing, O. very poor. But after me dead, then is kill one zebu in Diego Suarez. Kill, cut, cut, cut, eat. Everybody happy. Everybody come watchman for me dead, eat my zebu. If no have zebu, nobody remember me dead. Then me lost!

What if somebody is very poor? You're saying nobody will come to his funeral then?

Must have something. If not zebu, only Coca or rice. Then maybe people come. But not happy same zebu.

WHY I RECOMMEND THE HOTEL GLACIER

So at four o'clock the next morning O. and I got up to take the taxi-brousse. A taxi-brousse, operating in accordance with the most fundamental axia of capitalism, is a vehicle whose *patron* seeks to realize a maximum of profit with a minimum of overhead; hence a five a.m. departure time may actually be eight or nine because the *patron* will not permit the vehicle to leave until every space has been filled and then some; occasionally I've seen taxi-brousses wait until the door could literally barely close before the *patron* was satisfied. Luggage goes outside, on the roof, and if it gets dirty or wet that's just too bad. O. and I sat in the back this time, between a fat-thighed middle-aged woman and a skinny man who for the next six hours tried to gain an inch or two more by jabbing me with elbows which seemed to have been honed in a pencil-sharpener; for a few hours I ignored it; finally, when my ribs were black and blue, I shoved him back, and then he turned and stared out the window, exasperated with my poor manners. When he finally got out, the driver sent a small boy to occupy his place, which freed us up enough that the middle-aged woman

could slightly open her thighs, at which the driver shouted genially back (O.'s translation): Eh, your pussy *libre* now! and everybody laughed. —Me and this girl, we stop wash pussy now! O. called in reply. Oooh, very hot! My pussy very angry this heat!

The other woman's name was Athene. First she told O. that she hated white men (in Tamatave the word for Caucasians is *Vaza*). In French, she told me that she was happily married and would never leave her husband. When we stopped for lunch, she sat down at our table. —This girl very very nice, eh, darling? exclaimed O. with pleasure. My best friend! —When O. went to the bathroom, the best friend licked her lips at me and thrust her breasts out and told me that she would ditch her Malagasy husband anytime. We got back on the taxi-brousse, and I asked Athene where a good hotel to stay at in Antananarivo might be, because we'd have to overnight there before getting the taxi-brousse south, and Athene recommended the Hotel Glacier. Then I knew for sure what she was. The last time that O. and I had been to Antananarivo, we'd spent many happy lazy afternoons at the Hotel Glacier, I painting watercolor portraits of the business girls, O. drinking beer; and many *Vazas* sat at the tables and declined or very occasionally accepted the importunities of beggars and other vendors of self; and that was the Hotel Glacier by day, with only a hint of crime just outside where ever so many small boys with large hats were waiting to weep in French: *Give me money, Vaza!* meanwhile thrusting out professionally desperate wrists, the hats upturned to collect any crumbs or coins you might spare; and other hands reached beneath those sheltering hats into your pockets. That was last time, of course, before Antananarivo got worse. And that was by day. It got dark at around 6:00, so I could count on the fact that at about 5:30 it would be dusky and then the *mpangerapoussy*, the people whom O. called Mafia, would come out. O. was terrified of the Mafia. Once they'd cut their way into her house at night and taken her mattress and every last dress and blanket, her TV and some jewels that her English husband had given her, everything she had because in Madagascar the Mafia is poor and will take everything, sometimes your life; and then the Mafia went into Madame her Chinese *patronne's* house and held a knife to Madame's throat and took all her gold and rings; and that was why Madame paid a poor man now to be watchman. Often somebody would be found dead on the streets of Tamatave, maybe an accident, very rarely a suicide, sometimes a victim of the Mafia; and whenever O. heard about it she'd come running with everybody else to see the dead body before it got taken away. One time, hearing the exciting news of another such find, O. hustled off to a place very far from her house, a place where slender green trees burst from the red hillsides; and there she found a woman with her breasts cut off and a banana rammed up her vagina. —What did you think then? I asked her. —Me start to cry, darling. Because another woman killed from Mafia, so me very lonely for her. —And in the Chinese restaurant with her best friend Koko (who was waiting patiently for her marriage with a *Vaza* to resume), O. spoke

rapidly in Malagasy and when I asked her: What did you speak, darling? she replied: Me speak Koko, you must never buy a TV, never buy anything nice, must only hide your gold in the ground, because if you have something nice then Mafia listen, Mafia come, Mafia take in night time.⁶ Koko speak me: O., you speak true, good. Me never buy anything nice. Dangerous! —When O. said this I myself almost wanted to cry. And I thought: This is what poverty does. This is what violence does. This is what fear does. If people are too afraid to invest their wealth in society, if their best dreams only molder in coffers in the ground, how can what we call “infrastructure” be built? If a society as a whole cannot get rich, then most poor people will never be able to get rich, either. And that is why I hate the *mpangerapoussy*, because they hurt people whom I love like O., both by taking what they have and by blighting their very hopes. —At any rate, it was at 5:30 or so that the *mpangerapoussy* would start to arrive at the Hotel Glacier. One night O. and I were sitting at a table there with my friend Ben, and suddenly I looked at my watch and saw that we had overstayed our safe time; and just then three grim tall men came in, and one sat beside me and asked for my money. I had a good deal of cash in my money-belt and didn’t want to give it up, so I thought the wisest thing to do would be to go the pissoir, transfer a small amount to my wallet, and cede that to the Mafia. But the man followed me to the pissoir. He stood at my side, watching me urinate, and then followed me back to the table. O. and Ben and I went outside and got into a taxi, and the *mpangerapoussy* followed us, so we had the cab drop us at one hotel, went out the back, quickly caught another taxi, and went to the place where we actually stayed. The next day we left Antananarivo. So that was the Hotel Glacier; even the guidebook knew enough to say: *In Tana’ (especially in Tana) foreigners should never venture out of their hotel on foot after dark or walk to the railroad station early in the morning. If you ignore this warning, your chances of being mugged are nearly 100% and there have been some very nasty incidents. Hotel Glacier at the corner of Arabeny by Fabaleovantena and Lalana Rabefiraisana has received mixed reviews. The rooms, with their old furnishings and antique portable bidets, belong in a turn-of-the-century film set. However, it’s dim and dingy and the rooms are rarely cleaned... Incidentally, most of the muggings reported by readers have taken place in this area just on dusk, so avoid going out at night...*⁸—And that was where Athene advised us to stay. —Very nice! said O. brightly. OK, darling, you-me stay there with Athene! She is too much help us! —As soon as we are alone, she whispered: No good, darling! Oh, she *big big* Mafia, eh? Me small afraid!

We gave Athene the slip that night when we got to Antananarivo, and slept at another hotel. (Not same like Tamatave, O. sneered.) The next morning O. wanted me to buy breakfast, so we went by the Glacier and sat down among the business girls. There, of course, was Athene, made up to look ten years younger. She and O. embraced with cries of joy. I had to buy her a beer, too, and then lunch. —She speak, we go visit her room in hotel, said O.

Is that what you want, honey?

Yes, yes, darling. Because Athene my best friend, she replied, white-lipped.

Failing to see any formula for avoiding jealousy and possible malice on the part of at least one lady, I said nothing; and we went up to Athene's digs. O., overcome by beer, lay down on Athene's bed and began to snore. Athene watched her closely. Then she puffed her breasts out at me again, becoming kin to one of those echinoderms that rolls into a ball when touched, then opens cautiously, pulsing slowly, wriggling its multitudinous legs, stretching its segmented belly as if in a yawn. She took my hand and put it into the crack of her ass.

Very nice, Athene, I said.

If you want to leave her and stay with me, I would be happy to wait for you, she said in French.

Well, I'll just have to think about that, I said.

At the taxi-brousse station O. wouldn't speak to me because she thought that I loved Athene, who'd insisted on seeing us off. The two women embraced goodbye (or, as George Eliot put it, "amidst such caressing signs of mutual fear they parted")⁹ Then we boarded the taxi-brousse, while Athene stood alone in the bustle, watching us unsmiling. It took an hour before I could coax O. into trusting me again.

In Antsirabe she saw another girl from Tamatave and ran smiling to greet her; afterwards she told me that this other girl knew Athene well and that Athene had a reputation for robbing her husbands and sometimes stabbing them. This might have been true, or the other girl might have been telling O. what she thought O. wanted to hear, or O. might have been telling me what she thought would most efficiently prevent me from leaving her for Athene.

TRAVELING SOUTH

And now we were going to the country of the Malaso and the Dahalo. The taxi-brousse broke down every hour or so. Sometimes it was the tire. They had no spare tire, so they would stop, jack up the vehicle, remove the tire, tape it up and wrap grass around it, and continue on. This happened about fifty times. Other times it was the engine. The town of S., where the convict in Tamatave had said that we would find the zebu market, was about 800 kilometers south of Antananarivo. Those 800 kilometers took three days and three nights. At least there was music. They played one cassette over and over.

Do you like this song, O.?

Me no like. Is Tananarive¹⁰ song, French song. No like. Me small racist, darling.

When I think of Madagascar, I remember eroded roads and hills (they say that astronauts can see the erosion from the moon), jungle stumps with the soil between them now desert; I remember the smell of woodsmoke; I remember people's long skinny brown legs, and above all I remember dirty feet. Almost everybody goes

barefoot. Beautiful women in dainty dresses think nothing of walking unshod through open sewers (or for that matter adding to them; Madagascar is one of those countries where one can excrete almost where one pleases, and people do; every day I'd see O. squat down in the middle of the street, urine slowly hissing between her bare or sandaled feet; and afterward she'd smile and say: Ah, darling, a very sweet piss!) And the taxi-brousse continued south. Around Fianarantsoa tall slender tree-heads roofed the mountains with myriad moisture-caves, but then it got drier and redder. A woman in a yellow sunhat and yellow dress held her baby, standing in the shade at the side of the road, head high. A man in a red loincloth and a girl in a bathing suit, both very brown, sat on a mat in the sun behind a bamboo fence where the Hotel des Amis restaurant was, and they looked at us when we went by. Shadows spun in the sand as the reddish-orange blossom of a tree fern whirled on. We passed a barestripped hillside of stumps, and then a thousand more. After that it got hotter and drier and hellishly red. In Ihosy¹¹ I saw a man who had just been caught stealing a chicken. He'd stolen a zebu before, and was in the middle of doing two years in the calaboose. Because he had family and a little money, they let him out during the daytime to work; that was how had been able to snatch that chicken, he said to feed his family. Perhaps he was lying, since why should he need to feed his family if his family were successfully feeding him? Or perhaps he was telling the truth, and his family had impoverished themselves in making small presents to the *gardien chef de prison*; who knows? He stood there with a scared shamed smile, the chicken peeking out of his shirt, and all the villagers behind him. They were going to make him walk the rounds of Ihosy with the chicken at his breast for all to see, everyone laughing and jeering, and then they would bring him to the calaboose. I knew that he represented the other side of the moral equation; to O. and everybody else he was "Mafia," and surely what he had done was reprehensible, but he was poor and dirty and skinny and afraid, and I felt sorry for him.

How much longer will he serve now? I asked a man.

Six months.

That's hard.

Calaboose is very strict in Madagascar, the man said proudly.

Here is better than Tamatave, said O (the only time I ever heard her say that) In Tamatave, they catch man like that, never bring him in calaboose, only kill, quickly kill, everybody kill, because he take their food.¹²

South of Ihosy the desert reared up into low reddish and bluish escarpments. We passed the wreck of a bus, and the taxi-brousse driver told O. that the Dahalo had robbed it and wrecked it.¹³ Now at twilight the taxi-brousse broke down again, and O. was afraid and begged me to trust in God because this was the Dahalo country and night was coming. To the south I saw many flickering grass fires like candles. Finally they fixed the tire again, and we continued south. I fell asleep, only to be awakened by O.'s screams. The exhausted driver had dozed off at the wheel, and

we'd gone into a ditch. —You same same baby! she shouted at me. Everybody else get out, we almost dead, you only sleep-sleep-sleep!

Well, I said, I'd rather be asleep when I die.

O. passed this on to everybody else, and they laughed.

She herself tried to be cheery, but the terror of the Dahalo was heavy upon her and she could not shake it. A young boy named Bien-Aimée had told her that we could safely spend only two days in S. because as soon as we arrived somebody would go to get the Dahalo and on the third day the Dahalo would arrive and kill us for our money. I did not quite believe that things were this bad (and in fact Bien-Aimée turned out to be a parasitic exaggerator; we spent almost a week in S.), but I knew my own ignorance, and so I was a little afraid, too. We pushed the taxi-brousse back onto the potholed dirt road which had once been paved, and I fell asleep again. Not long past midnight, the taxi-brousse broke down for good. Early the next morning we found a truck that was going to S. At 8:00 we arrived. We left our baggage at our hotel and set out to find the zebu stealers.

SUCCESS

I have to say that this was one of easiest things I've ever done. We walked down to the market, and in a concrete pavilion many men were sitting, some with their arms folded, some in hats, some grizzled, some young with piercing eyes, some with their eyes closed as they sat thinking; but all with a serious look, what one might call "the community look." It is not too difficult to know when one is in the presence of the elders.

What's going on here? I asked O.

They speak these two men this one and this one they have big trouble, because rich man say they steal from him one zebu. But they never steal. Rich man try to put them in calaboose. But these men they want to help their friends. Every in vil-lage S. is *contra* rich man. Nobody like him. They want help these two men.

So the rich man is lying?

Yes. He speak liar, because never show paper for stolen zebu. Every zebu must have paper with signature of *gendarme de customs*. If no paper, zebu is from steal. So maybe rich man never have this zebu he say is steal from two men. If he have this zebu, then he himself steal zebu before, sure.

Please tell these folks that I'd like to buy the two accused men a bottle of rum, I said.

The elders broke into applause.¹⁴

I thought about it. Then I understood. They were all in it together. They were all Dahalo.

In the afternoon all of them except the two who were in trouble showed up at the hotel. The two men had paid money to get out of the calaboose, but just now the rich man had paid more money to a customs officer who had put them back in

the calaboose again. I picked out a man in a tatty blue windbreaker who wore a knowing look, and asked if I could interview him.

He said he knew all about the Malaso. He said that tomorrow he could take us to his "country," about sixteen kilometers away; and there we'd see many stolen zebu.

THE COUNTRY OF STOLEN ZEBU

The man led us into a land that had been burned as far as the eye could see. He was very happy with an empty bottle which I had given him. He said that he would use it to store cooking oil, or maybe zebu fat. The earth was black and tan and smeared with white ash. Sometimes huge strange trees rose unscathed from that burned world, but more often I saw only dead stumps. Broken trunks strained thinly up. Pale paths had been worn into the greyness, and they meandered among decapitated timber to lose themselves in a dreary fringe of deadness at the horizon. Here and there, smoke swirled. The man in the blue windbreaker walked steadily on, barefoot on the burning dirt. O. huffed and puffed. —Me drink too much beer, she said. Cannot go quickly-quickly.

Whom does this land belong to? I asked.

The rich man who put those two men in calaboose.

Did the rich man burn it? Why did they destroy all those trees?

Now this one speak, somebody come in the night and make fire. No sure who or why. Maybe from malice; maybe *jaloux*. But now this land very good for corn and manioc.

Smiling, the man reached into a mound of ashes and pulled out a tuber. He peeled the skin off a piece and gave it to me to eat. It tasted very firm and wholesome and good. I wondered if he had been one of the burners. Surely the rich man had suffered a terrible loss, to have all his forests burned up. The charred land smoldered evilly.

We continued for another hour. Every now and then we'd cross another dead black ridge, and discover that the fire had eaten beyond the next horizon also. The hideous landscape stretched before us, the backbones of trees squiggling upward with all the branches gone, and then sometimes no stumps at all, just gently slanting plains of ash sometimes scattered with gnawed corncobs, a country almost without scale, like the Arctic plains, because every feature that could teach the eye proportion had been burned. Walking in the ash was tiring, like trudging through beach sand. Purple with effort, O. shouted angrily at the man. His reply, however, shook her with chuckles. —Now I speak him, why you go go go when before you speak me not far, not far? He speak me: O., me speak liar because if no speak liar you never come here, then Vaza never give me small present!

Finally we began to see tiny, wretched thatched huts, some empty, some destroyed by the burning, and some still inhabited by skinny soot-smeared people who squatted listlessly on mats, their hand and faces buzzing with flies.

He speak, he have no education, no job. For eat he know only be watchman. Watch, watch for zebu from rich man. Steal zebu and sell, steal zebu and eat. His Papa, grandfather same. That his business.

The man brought us to his house. His wife was thirty-five—my age. She looked fifty. She offered us water and led us to a mat in the shade of a charred tree.

Now we must wait for zebu to come back from drink in river, said O. He speak me, all zebu here is steal from rich man.

From nowhere the man's friends came, gaunt and dirty and sooty in top hats; they gathered around and sat in the ashes, watching us. I noticed that they all carried knives. —Me afraid, O. whispered. All these is big Malas. If you no speak good, I think maybe they kill. For me dead is no problem, but me very sad if you come so far from your country to have problem here. Please, my husband, I want pray to God.

Don't worry, honey. Tell them that in two or three days you and I must go to Tulare to get big money from the bank, and then we'll come back here and spend it.

In spite of herself, she laughed again. —Now you understand Malagasy! You speak liar very good same same me! Now you finish baby; you speak good clever!

Thank you, O. Ask him how the Malas began, I said.

He speak, before Malas was here Dahalo. But they catch big bosun of Dahalo and put in calaboose, then police kill, so must change name for this country. Before Dahalo was very long time. In that time, he speak, they steal people for slaves. Steal man for work work work; steal girl for fuck. If she make baby then keep, if not then must work or is kill. When catch slave, old Dahalo is brand them, but not like cattle brand. Make invisible brand on face with Malagasy medicine. After that, nobody can see brand, but slave never leave. Must always follow Malagasy medicine.

How long ago was that?

He speak me, don't know.

And now?

Now zebu is better to steal than people. People always eat, eat, eat. And people is no magic. Zebu is magic. Zebu is everything.

MALAGASY MEDICINE

In Tamatave, when the shipyard worker had told me the tale of the cave of skulls, I hadn't quite believed it, but I now give it substantial credence, especially the part about sorcerers. Malagasy "medicine" is as ubiquitous as the zebu and sometimes seems linked with zebu in some secret sacred way. For example, I remember one night of pale trees in darkness and files of people in pale shirts walking at the edge of a mountain road; we were a little north of Fianarantsoa, and the man who was driving O. and me leaned harder on the gas pedal as we came into one nondescript town; he said that we would die if we stopped there. (A brown woman hugged the

doorway of her hillside hut, peering shyly out.) Everybody there was Dahalo, the driver said. If we were to sleep there, the Dahalo would make Malagasy medicine which would prevent us from hearing or seeing them; they'd come right into our hotel room and crouch over our beds until the mystic hour of five a.m., at which time they'd stab us. He said that not far from here was a certain mountain which contained much gold, but no Malagasy could see the gold unless they went there with a zebu. Some people had tried, and only wandered in a circle. A group of German tourists, however, had scoffed at the zebu requirement and found the gold without trouble. The reason was that they didn't believe in Malagasy medicine.

Like many of her countrymen, O. was nominally Catholic, and claimed not to believe in the medicine. But whenever something bad happened, she was quick to blame it. She was like those people who do not believe in God but still fear the Devil.¹⁵ After the taxi-brousse had gone off the road en route to S., O. had complained vitriolically to the driver, who'd pulled an angry, jealous face, and Bien-Aimée had wanted her to desist because the driver was a *grand bosun* of Malagasy medicine—in other words, a sorcerer. A few minutes afterward, O. got a terrible stomach ache. Later, when the taxi-brousse died completely, the driver offered to return to O. and me three thousand apiece, but O. smiled her best friend smile at him and later explained: I speak him no problem. I speak him: me my darling husband pay ride in truck no problem, not driver's fault. Because me small afraid he make me new pain in *estomac*, darling.

A sadly characteristic incident which occurred almost at the end of our stay in S. illustrates how Malagasy medicine can reify jealousy. Now that O. had begun to "come old," as she put it, she took great pains every night to rub a snot-textured eucalyptus-smelling oil into her face. The hotel where we stayed was actually a family's house. Our room was midway between a small cafe in the front and a family room in the rear overlooking a courtyard of packed dirt where *tout le monde* went to urinate; as a matter of fact *tout le monde* felt free to pass through our room at all hours. I cannot remember any time when we did not have an audience of at least half a dozen people standing just outside in the narrow alley piles with logs, leaning hands and chins on our windowsill and gazing inside in fascination. *Madame la patronne's* two oldest daughters flashed in and out of the chamber on various errands; the smaller children hung around waiting for me to give them vitamins; O. frequently dispatched them to buy rum or mineral water or other such items. Of the two daughters, one, a sixteen-year-old, was strikingly beautiful. Bien-Aimée, who'd tried her himself, reported that she was compliant and a very good fit (O. once told me: Malagasy girl never take shower in hot water, darling. Only cold. Because cold water keep pussy small!). I had not understood that the sixteen-year-old was a business girl until after I'd painted her portrait, when she anticipated her small present; my other subjects had been happy with a thousand or a thousand five hundred, but when I asked what *cadeau* Mademoiselle required (no, not Mademoiselle, said her

mother patiently. Madame! She has a baby; she even has a husband, but nobody knows where he is...), I was told maybe a VCR or a bicyclette. Apparently those were the sorts of things that Japanese men gave her. —She business girl sure. Me understand Japanese character very well—ha, ha, ha! said O. contemptuously. Japanese never give like that unless they first understand her pussy *complet*, understand her heart. —I had to agree. At any rate, young Madame appeared eager to practice mammalian reproductive biology; she followed me to the outhouse, stood staring longingly into my eyes as O. and I ate dinner, touched my hand—all of which signs O., of course, did not fail to perceive. One night she asked O. if she could use some of her oil. O. gave her half. The next night O.'s oil had disappeared. My assumption was simply that young Madame or some other party had taken the oil because it was a thing worth having. Wrong; not Machiavellian enough. —You no understand Malagasy, never understand nothing! cried O. in a rage. In bar, in street, I hear everybody speak *tak-taktak-tak-tak*, speak very *jaloux* because me with you. You rich Vaza. But you good heart, give give give give. Nobody jealous you. But me Malagasy girl. Me make business. So everybody jealous me. Want steal my *huile* so me finish beautiful. After me no more beautiful, then you leave me. Other Malagasy big happy then! —In vain I sought to convince O. that I would never leave her even if all the face-oil in the world disappeared; she raged and wept and feared and could not be comforted. —The following night I went to the outhouse and then decided to take a stroll by myself, since O. was playing cards with Bien-Aimée and some of the children. This was an ill-advised decision on my part, but I simply did not think it through. O. and I had been together practically every second. Because O. was a *fille de plaisir*, she'd grown accustomed to eating and drinking as much as she could at her husbands' expense; in fact she'd often ask me whether she was putting on weight, and when I replied in the affirmative she chuckled, delighted; the other business girls in Tamatave would admire me and respect her when she came home fat because that meant that I'd been generous. I had no objection to O.'s increasing resemblance to a beer barrel, but she had begun to develop a proportional antipathy for physical activity, including walking, so I thought that a half-hour or so alone would allow me to cover more ground and let O. save her breath. When I returned, she was packing up to leave me. Apparently young Madame had disappeared at the same time; O. had drawn her own conclusions. With the utmost goodwill I still cannot forget some of things she said to me. Nonetheless, after a scene which endured three hours she finally agreed to stay, less, I think, as a perhaps result of my coaxing and pleadings than because young Madame's mother, the hotel proprietress, pointed out (as O. later told me) that if O. left me, Bien-Aimée would probably bring me to a dark street, rob me and kill me; and then O. might conceivably have problems with the police. This appeal to practicalities having had its effect, O. then made a very interesting accusation. She turned to Bien-Aimée, whom she loathed, and shouted that he had been making

Malagasy medicine against her and me. Her evidence was that (1) he believed in Malagasy medicine, (2) I had been with O. a long time and was good to her, so it went without saying that he was jealous of her (what I think this shows, by virtue of projection, is that O. herself was jealous of the forty thousand a day I was paying Bien-Aimée to introduce me to local zebu rustlers); and finally (3) that O. and I been together for a long time without ever having problems, which was true. For O. the only explanation was a magical one.

I never met a criminal in Madagascar who did not believe in Malagasy medicine.

When I asked Bien-Aimée if there were any sorcerers in the village of S., I expected him to say, as he said about everything else: Ah, Huile [that was how he pronounced my name; the same as O.'s word for oil], that will be very difficult. —Instead he brought me straightaway to the house of an imposing old person in a denim jacket with tassels of gold dangling down his forehead like bangs, and immense silver bracelets that glowed and dazzled me in the darkness of his hut. (All those items were medicine.) He could make me something which would render me invulnerable. —No, no, Bien-Aimée, I said. Please tell him that I want something that will help me kill, like the Malaso. —The sorcerer said that that would be no problem. O., imagining that there might be something to all this and bearing in mind that it was not her money, asked him if for the same price he'd throw in something to give her a permanent husband. The sorcerer allowed that he could. —Now, what *was* his price? —One zebu.

In Madagascar a zebu costs anywhere from one hundred and fifty thousand to four hundred and fifty thousand francs. This is a already phenomenal amount of money for a Malagasy. When I asked the sorcerer how much a zebu cost, he said one million. Then I understood that he, like all the rest of us, had "spoken liar;" most likely he had agreed to give Bien-Aimée half of his takings, that being normal business procedure.

HOW TO DISGUISE A ZEBU

And now the zebu which had once belonged to various rich men and which now belonged to the man in the blue windbreaker came wandering slowly back from some watering hole, and I asked the man to show me what he did to keep the customs officials from reclaiming them. He smiled.

Inside the dark, smoky and sweltering hut he squatted over the hearth whose ashes were not so very different from the ashes that lay for miles and miles outside. He took a pan, stretched his arm outside the house, and scooped up a few handfuls of sand. He added a small amount of water. Then he set the pan on the fire. Every now and then he tested the sand with his finger, until after about ten minutes choking smoke rose from it and it hurt to touch. Then he took the pan, went out, and hurled sand over a black zebu. The animal snorted in pain and fright and ran. The man only watched.

He speak, after four days, this zebu is come white. Hair go white from burning.

He speak, use different dirt, can also make zebu go red.

JEALOUSY AGAIN

The man in the blue windbreaker was also a sorcerer—and an authentic Malaso to boot. His price (which included marital aid for O.) was sixty thousand. (I had learned enough not to bring Bien-Aimée along; anyhow I think he was busy screwing young Madame.) The second time that O. and I visited him, I asked him to make the Malagasy medicine.

Sitting in the corner, an immense lump of fat from a stolen zebu hanging from a hook over his head, he took four pieces of different woods and made shavings from them. He told me their magic names. They were called *God help me* and *men help me* and *good success* and *me never help you* (a characteristic Malagasy touch; in this country the strong soul draws affection but never spends itself for others). This was the Malaso medicine. He prayed for a long time. O. translated:

He speak, somebody kill Bill, they try try try, but their bullet turn to water, can never kill. Somebody try kill Bill, Bill get strong, somebody die. Somebody try hurt Bill, Bill only laughing, somebody have big pain trouble. God always help Bill; Bill never help anybody. Patron of Bill like Bill too much, give him more money, money come up, up, but Bill never like patron, never help him. Always for Bill, money is come up, up, up. Me pray for Bill not for money but only because I like Bill too much. (The expensive sorcerer had made the same hypocritical qualification, like some priest in the Middle Ages pocketing the money for indulgences.)

What am I supposed to do with this?

Every morning you must take small small powder, mix with honey, and rub on your face. Then you smell nice like this. You speak the four names of the woods. Then you speak: Patron always like me. You speak: Today is nobody kill me. You must keep medicine always in your pocket, except on Mondays. On Mondays medicine must rest. You can never eat pork anymore. If you eat pork, then this Malagasy medicine broken. —Speak me true, darling. I no speak him. Do you believe? He speak, if you no believe, this medicine no good.

No, honey, I don't believe. If his medicine works so well, how come he's poorer than I am? He's a nice guy, though. And you?

Me sometimes believe, sometimes no believe. My Mama good religious. You must never speak her me little bit believe Malagasy medicine, darling. Me no want Mama angry.

The truth is that the man in the blue windbreaker *did* have a very nice face. In Antananarivo I met a convicted murderer who had the same gently friendly cast of features. The murderer said that he was innocent, that he hadn't come in through the wall of the boutique and killed his patron. —If he no kill patron, they never put here in calaboose twenty years! said O. indignantly. He speak, this big bosun of Mafia who kill, he know him only on bus. He speak you liar, darling! —Beside him

was an extortionist who had a less likeable appearance. Maybe it was for that very reason that he did not deny anything. He said that he was once a customs gendarme. He had decided to become Malaso. So he entered into a scheme of forging court summonses against rich men. The rich men were afraid to come before the tribunal, so they paid him to quash the summonses. He'd gotten seven years. He said he was guilty, so I trusted him. This sorcerer in the blue windbreaker, now, he was too open; as the days went by I began to fear him slightly. One afternoon O. and I came into the burned place with the two men whom the rich man had put into the calaboose; they'd paid another official and were free again, and I asked them to show me how to "make the Malaso positions," as O. put it; and the man in the blue windbreaker was there, smiling and happy; I wondered if he wanted to kill me. How jealous was he? The previous night I'd spoken with three convicted Malaso, zebu, rustlers all. Their sentences ranged from six to ten years apiece. One had gotten caught because he did not run far enough away with the zebu before he fell asleep. The second and third had attracted the notice of gendarmes because they'd sold zebu here and there on the long road to the market in Ihosy. (I think one reason why the professionals whom I interviewed in the burned land had not gotten caught was because the first thing they did after stealing a herd was to kill one fine animal and leave it near the road, a magnet for other hungry or greedy souls; hence when the gendarmes did come there were dozens of suspects, none of them the true culprits, who meanwhile continued on their way.)

I asked one man why he stole.

I was always hungry, he said. My father also was hungry. My father knew only one thing: how to be a Malas. He taught me the way, so that I could eat.

Whom do you rob?

If a man is rich, then I grow jealous.

Am I rich? I asked the man.

Of course. You are Vaza, so you must be rich.

Are you jealous of me?

There was a short silence. Then Bien-Aimée translated: He says that because you have given him big money, he is very happy with you and he wants always to be near you. He is never jealous of you. Had you given him no money, then he would have been compelled to rob you.

The Malaso walked behind us and on our right and on our left. They were all carrying spears. We were very far now in the burned lands here it was hot and sooty and lonely, and O. said: We must be very careful. If they kill us, nobody see.

The man in the blue windbreaker was talking to one of the two men from the calaboose.

Which do you like better, zebu or gold? I asked the second man's wife.

Madame speak only zebu is good, O. translated. Madame is no like gold because her grandfather no like gold, never use gold, only zebu.

Now they were showing me how the Malaso steal. They squatted in ambush behind charred branches and thorns, watching and waiting for zebu. I had considered paying them to let me accompany them when they actually did what they did, but I could not justify that to myself. They were, after all, thieves and murderers. One of them pretended to be the rich man. He stood by the zebu, and then the Malaso shouted three times and came rushing across the hot sand, leaping upon slender skittery legs with their spears outthrust. And the pretended rich man pretended to run, and they took the zebu, and that was that.

How much should I give them? I asked O.

Maybe twenty-five thousand. I don't know.

I gave them twenty-five thousand, and because they could not calculate they asked me what each person's share would be. I told them, and asked if they were happy. They nodded silently. O. had turned very pale, and sat down weakly near the black meteor-like boulder of a termite's nest. I took out another twenty-five thousand and they all shouted with joy and O. got up smiling and I knew that we were safe. —Tell them in a week's time we'll come back with much more money, I lied.

THE WORTH OF TWO SHOES

It is very easy to believe that for the zebu-stealers in S. the ends genuinely justify the means. Those dirt-encrusted faces speak to me in a hot and desperate silence. People must eat. And if they do in fact discriminate between rich people who help them and rich people who are selfish, then they fill an almost normative function, like the voodoo societies described in Wade Davis's *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. (Davis argues that only greedy or otherwise antisocial people are zombified.) And the cruel inequity of the Malagasy legal system increases my sympathy for the Malaso of S. In Tulear, posing as a Catholic missionary (as O. remarked: Darling, if you no speak liar in Madagascar, you lost!), I was granted a permit to visit the *Maison Centrale*. It did not seem wise to push my luck and take photographs under the eyes of the *gardien chef de prison*, who unlike the *gardien chef* in Tamatave was incorruptible; he sat coolly behind his desk while O. and I possessed ourselves of low chairs and the three prisoners to whom the Blessed Church of William T. Vollmann would give big money to¹⁶ squatted in the corner. The first was a young man with a withered leg. On account of his deformity no Malagasy woman would go with him, so he'd raped a twelve-year-old girl, the daughter of his patron. The *gardien chef* said that he might serve seven years or maybe twenty. The rapist said that what he most needed was a pair of shoes because he had to sleep in a crouch with eight other men and the floor was a running sewer and shoes might help overcome an infection in his bad leg. The second also had a wooden staff to help him ambulate; getting drunk, he'd played with his wife a little roughly and then a little more roughly; finally for a joke he'd stabbed her dead; then he took up housebreaking. He was, in short, a

Malaso. One night with two comrades he'd burst into a home and sprayed the interior with ammoniac to blind and intimidate; then the three had begun to haul the valuables to the roof for later hiding. The gendarmes had come; his friends had gone; he'd leaped off the roof and smashed his leg forever. The third was a thin, scared middle-aged woman with a foul smell. She had worked in the house of a rich man. The rich man had paid her so little that she was often hungry. One night he seduced her and she became pregnant. After the baby was born she was even weaker than before, so finally the poor creature stole two blankets and tried to sell them. The receiver took the blankets, then a day or two later said that unless he could keep them and the thirty thousand as well, he'd inform against her. She had already spent the money on food. Voila! The *gardien chef* said that she'd gotten two years. As she sat gazing dully downward, her right hand lifted slowly, as if of its own accord, and unbuttoned the top fastening of her rags. At first I thought that she was compelled to scratch away the intolerable itching of her lice, but then I saw something small and round and black inside her shapeless vestments; it was the crown of her baby's head. She raised it to her nipple, and it seemed almost too weak to suck. It never cried or made any noise, and I saw no more of it than the top of its head; it seemed only to infest her like some sorrowful species of vermin. —O. reported: She speak her baby very sick, because not enough food in prison.

What do they eat here?

Only manioc. All these three very skinny, because they have no family. So the *gardien chef* choose them to speak you, because you must help them. Excuse me, darling. I go toilet.

She had not been gone more than a moment when I heard her scream: *Come quickly!* and because the *gardien chef de prison* did not prevent me, I rose and strode in the direction of her voice, turning left into the office of the two gullible gendarmes whom I'd tricked into letting me photograph them the previous night, and then out into the hot sandy courtyard, and then left again to a gate where the toilet was; the toilet was evidently also the hospital. And in the hospital a human being—man or woman I don't know—was lying belly down, swaddled in cloth the color of dirt. The face lay unmoving in the dirt. I have seen photographs of Auschwitz and this sight was not as shocking as that; the hands and feet were skinny but not skeletal; nonetheless I hope that someday I'll be able to forget how that conscious carcass looked. I did not take a picture.

This one want die, explained O. From sickness and from no food. Here is only manioc and manioc no good for this one.

I went back to the *gardien chef de prison* and gave him another twenty-five thousand for the dying convict. The *gardien chef* thanked me and said that I had a good heart. A gendarme took the money and went out at a run to get a doctor. —That one die anyway, said O. If not today then tomorrow sure.

How do you feel about that?

For me not *interessant*. For your job maybe *interessant*, but for me no. Me no like. Only that Madame steal blanket, for her me very sad, because she must eat. The others, for me they can rest forever in calaboose.

So, as I said, the circumstances of these lives were grim enough to inspire pity, in me if not in hardboiled O. But the misery they lived and died in could never for me justify causing misery in others. When O. and I returned to Antananarivo I became a Catholic missionary again (since in Madagascar hospitals are just as off-limits to foreign journalists as prisons), and, after promising the gatekeeper a small present, O. and I were permitted to ascend the long slanted vinyl-treaded walkways of darkness. We went down corridors crowded with silent anguished not-yet-processed, and came into the wards where patients bled and gurgled and thrashed and lay still. And we found a victim of the *mpangerapoussy*.

He was more than eighty years old. He'd been carrying some small money in his hand after dark when four Mafia men spied him and opened his skull.

Is he in pain? I asked the doctor, who spoke some French.

Oh, yes, extreme pain, said the doctor cordially.

Does this hospital have any medicine for pain?

No. Nothing.

If I were to give you the money to buy medication for this man in a pharmacy outside, would you do it?

The doctor had already begun to look bored and disgusted, so I quickly added: Of course I'd want to give you a small present, doctor, and he brightened. His colleagues rushed in and affixed a chart to the foot of the old man's bed and wrote out all the doses; it was very inspirational to see them bustle about.

The second one was a taxi driver. Two *mpangerapoussy* had come into his cab posing as passengers and then four more had appeared from nowhere, and they'd beaten him unconscious and taken sixty thousand. I made the same request, to which the doctor acceded most joyfully, and later when O. and I were alone I asked her if those two patients would ever get their medicine, and she said: Never. The old man maybe, but I think never. Driver never. Why you give give like baby? Never give me nothing. Doctors in Madagascar very poor. Must keep for themselves.

So that was reason enough to dislike the Mafia, and I had even more reason when they began to stalk O. Her little brother had agreed to watch her house while she and I were away because the watchman that Madame her patronne employed was very very poor and his wages were small so there was a good chance that he would not be there watching; although the *mpangerapoussy* was not as virulent in Tamatave as in Antananarivo or Tulear, other species of evil did exist, which was why O. had warned me never to take a *pousse-pousse* alone in Tamatave at night,¹⁷ with her or any other business girl it was no problem, because the *pousse-pousse* drivers knew that the business girls understood and remembered the numbers on their *pousse-pousses*, but if you were, say, a foreign sailor in search of feminine comfort, a *pousse-pousse* driver

might agree to bring you to Queen's Disco but instead walk you into the night shadows under lonely trees where other *pousse-pousse* drivers waited to spray your eyes with ammoniac and take everything, stabbing you if you resisted; their ammoniac had permanently blinded a Japanese chief engineer of O.'s intimate acquaintance; and then there were the Malaso who stopped a car with three Russians in it, took all their money, shot them and then set the car ablaze; there were the ones who had stabbed a Catholic priest a week or two since; and of course there were the three men who had sliced their way into O.'s house; thus O.'s brother was necessary, and O. wanted to buy him something in Antananarivo to reward him and keep him from being jealous; he'd asked for a pair of shoes like mine, so after an hour or so in the market we found some shoddy facsimiles for seventy thousand which O. bargained down to sixty. So there we were, with merchandise worth about sixteen dollars; that was enough to bring in the *mpangerapoussy*. Almost immediately a tall grim man began to cut us off from the right. In a few years he'd be just a poor man, an old man like a brown humped zebu pawing, but right now he still had his strength, and he had his need and his plan and his confederates. —Look! whispered O. faintly. Another one on left, two behind—four Mafia is coming quickly!

Now a woman approached O. and said in a low voice: *Attention, Madame!*

Quick-quick! cried O., almost weeping. We must take taxi.

The four men were almost on us when we saw a cab. O. opened the door and we leaped in without bargaining first. I looked out the window and saw those four visages of baffled cruelty and greed, and almost shuddered. O.'s hand was hot and sweaty in mine.

And I remember another time, a nighttime when I went out with O. to photograph some *mpangerapoussy*—just street kids these, scrawny, hungry, bored, desperate and bold like rats as they sat around their fire on the sidewalk. They were very young; I was not afraid of them at first. O. explained to them that I'd give twenty-five thousand for a photograph or two. They swarmed around us laughing then, their hands in our faces as I worked the camera; O. screamed as the first one slid his hand into her pocket and then one tried to pull me down and I kicked out, and suddenly I saw a dull gleam and looking down I spied a knife in the darkness, twisting toward my crotch. I kicked that boy also, as hard as I could, and then I pulled out the twenty-five thousand and threw it at them and pulled O. away and I'll never know why they didn't follow us and pull us down. They were everywhere in Antananarivo, those Mafia bands; they owned the darkness, and I hated them. Their poverty did not excuse them. They were evil. —Me no like your job! O. wept. Your job is no good!—It is O. whom I remember now when I think about the Malagasy Mafia.

MADAME DRACULA

The woman who smelled like a toilet understood that I would pay her bigger money if she kept completely still while I painted her portrait, but she could not keep her predatory eyes from darting constantly, desperately, hungrily back and forth, pacing and leaping and rushing within the whites. —Tell her she is very beautiful, I said to O.

O. complied, then said: *Beautiful?* You like her? Want fuck her? She same same Dracula! No good. I speak her: Madame, you must wait on balcony. Never come inside room. Maybe she steal. I think is big Mafia. Must be very dangerous.

Tell her I'll pay her another five thousand if she'll show us how to steal a purse.

Madame Dracula's pupils sparkled at this news. She scuttered into the darkness beyond the doorway and lurked there, glaring out at O.

She speak, now she make the Mafia position.

The woman came swooping out, an expression of rage and hideous gloating on her face as she snatched at the strap of O.'s bag.

How long has she been a thief?

Now she has thirty-six years. Her father always dead. Mother in very far away place. She never have school, no nothing. Always hungry. Now have three baby. Must feed them. Very difficult. Ever since she have fourteen years she make like this.

Has she seen many people killed by the *mpangerapoussy*?

Many, many!

Does she ever feel sad to see them die?

Never. Happy, because she can eat.

Later that day I asked O. to bring me back another street woman at random for me to paint, and when she returned with a girl in rags she said: This one just sitting with many people, sitting like watchmen. I ask her what she do there and she say nothing. I think maybe *everybody* in Tananarive now is Mafia! —The girl sat sullenly enough as I painted her. I thought that I had perhaps previously seen her pale eyes under a straw hat in the rain; she'd been an urchin wrapped in pink plastic. —Ask Mademoiselle if she has ever been to the calaboose. —She speak, only for two days. —What was her crime? —She kill one man and one woman with knife. Police catch her and bring in calaboose, but she pay thirty thousand and then go, no problem.

I looked at her and could not help but recall the chicken thief in Ihosy who got six months. I wondered if he would die of hunger like the man in Tulear.

Ask her if she ever feels sorry for the people whom the Mafia kill.

The young woman only shrugged.

She no speak nothing! Never answer! Oh, husband, she have very bad heart this one! Not same Tamatave! Me big afraid! Your job no good. Why you must see these evil hearts? Very bad, very dangerous! Now she see our *chambre*, maybe she speak big

bosun *mpangerapoussy* come kill kill kill!

How do the Mafia decide whom to kill?

She speak, have always small boy watching, running, looking like watchmen. When small boy see, then they go to small bosun *mpangerapoussy*. Small bosun tell big bosun. Then big bosun come run run run with knife, like that.

Ask Madame Dracula to tell us about the first time she saw somebody killed, I said.

O. listened, then shook her head. —Horrible what she speak! Darling, she speak, first time, she see like that, she have only fourteen years. And some rich Madame here in Tananarive go market. This rich Madame have baby still inside. And she come shopping, to buy food. And Madame Dracula watch. Then four men come watching. And rich Madame slip in her high heel shoes. Then she fall, and four men come quickly running, running. They pull her down. First one he cut her purse and take. Second one he cut her throat, rich madame bleeding, bleeding everywhere. Third one he cut dress down, all down like this, take dress, cut inside Madame, kill Madame, cut open baby still inside. Fourth one he look listen, speak everybody you must never tell police; then they all run run. And Madame Dracula she find small money from Madame on sidewalk, so keep, very very happy. But me think Madame Dracula speak liar, because Mafia never leave money like that. Me think she help Mafia, watching, keeping quiet, maybe even help kill Madame. She speak like that.

Madame Dracula suddenly studied me, as if to make out how she might best forage from this direction. —She speak, she show you how Madame die, explained poor O. wearily.

Now Madame Dracula took off her top, showed me her breasts, lay down on her back, and rested the knife-tip in her flesh. Dutifully I took a photograph. A moment later, when she thought that O. might not be looking, she spread her legs and winked. I thought of Athene at the Hotel Glacier.

Ask her whom the Mafia like to kill.

Anybody rich. Anybody with clothes; anybody with food.

Closing my eyes, I could almost see for a moment the four men swarming around that doomed woman like sharks, pulling her down and cutting, shining with joy and savage need. And I thought of the young boys who had tried to jerk me off balance, and wondered what would have happened if I'd fallen. Maybe nothing. Maybe.¹⁸

If they were going to kill me, what would they do?

She speak, if they only rob you, just take take take. Then maybe cut you with knife. If is kill you, first they take your glasses. Spray ammoniac in eyes. Now you cannot see, great pain in eyes for you; easy for them to kill. Very dangerous what she speak, eh?

Very dangerous. Does she understand how the *mpangerapoussy* use their knives

to kill?

Yes, understand.

Tell her I want to learn how to kill. Tell her to buy me a knife and bring back two men who understand murdering, so that you and I can learn.

She say OK. Oh, darling, me little bit scared.

Madame Dracula came back with a knife and two men, one of whom was her son. At night I sometimes saw the son and his friend in company with some other Mafia, strolling down the street in a happy way, owning rum or a handful of Good Luck cigarettes; once I saw them chasing another man, and I didn't dare go after them to see what happened. The two men showed me how they did it. It was easy. They kept sharpened butcher knives up their sleeves. There was nothing to it. They pulled the victim down and embraced him, thrusting the knife deep into the abdomen, over and over until he was dead. Madame Dracula knew how to do it very well, too. She smiled when she did it. Across the corridor I could smell her, the strong sour smell of a skinny black and white snake.

Do they believe in Malagasy medicine?

Yes. All believe.

After that, O. started to go to pieces. She was afraid day and night. She became convinced that the hotel staff were Mafia, and for all I know they were. It was a pleasure to hear the instinctive lies she told. She was everybody's best friend. She and I had been married for six years. She listed the names and ages of our three children, and elaborated upon their dispositions at great length. As soon as her best friends left, she'd rush to the keyhole to see if they were spying on us and wanted to murder us. I did not think that we were in very great danger, but because she felt such fear I agreed to change hotels. I myself had begun to feel a nagging nervousness because day after day when we went out tall desperate men would follow us. On the morning that we checked out, O. told everybody that we were going to Tamatave to get big dollars and then we'd come back to stay for a month. It was already eight. That was the Mafia hour, O. said, but to her every hour was the Mafia hour. We ran out as quickly as we could with the baggage and started putting it into a taxicab when Madame Dracula's son and his friend came up and asked us for five hundred. I was stupid and principled and wouldn't have given it to them, but trembling sweating O. snatched a thousand-franc note posthaste from her purse; and they smiled and wished us a *bon journée* and were gone. Suddenly I remembered a story which O. had told me about her best friend, a business girl from Tamatave, who had come to Antananarivo with a rich Vaza. A beggar-boy had asked them for five hundred. Rudely the whore had replied: Why do you keep asking me? Why don't you work? Leave my husband and me alone! —The boy had run away, but, as O. had put it, the Mafia "listened." No doubt the boy ran to a bigger boy, and the bigger boy to some *grand bosun de Mafia*, because the next thing that business girl knew, she was in a taxicab, safe as she thought, when four men came running and

smashed through the windows and cut her gold necklace off her and then slashed her dress from top to bottom and took that, too; slashed her bra and panties and took her shoes and purse and every last thing and then cut her once, not to kill her but only to warn her to remember the jealous ones next time...



SPECIAL TAX

(2001)

We want the United States to understand the sorrow of the Congo, so that it can help us to regain our dignity.

DOCTOR ADOLPHE ONOSUMBA YEMBA,
PRESIDENT OF THE RASSEMBLEMENT CONGOLAIS POUR LA DÉMOCRATIE

1

Some years ago, I sold my soul to the magazines. The price I got was excellent: money enough to buy whatever I wanted (my wants, perhaps, are small), adventures in exotic countries, and more liberty of expression and behavior than my friends get accorded. In exchange I laid down my illusions about painting The Big Picture, not to mention “making a difference.” They used to allow me twenty thousand words. Then it was ten. Now if I’m lucky it’s five to seven, a phrase which sounds like a prison sentence but which actually means *less work for me*. I never complain unless they change yes to no, misspell my name, or, God forbid, fail to pay on time.

Accordingly, after you finish reading this sketch of “the Congo,” which is a huge region comprising two countries each with its government and insurgent zones, each afflicted by its own coups, civil wars, invading neighbors and intentional acci-

dents of superseded Euro-imperialism, you won't know much more about Congolese politics than you do now; but maybe you don't care about Congolese politics anyway. Like those American farmers who get paid not to sow, I cash-converted to the "less is more" school, will confine myself to writing about certain African counterparts of mine, who likewise cast their mercenary nets upon the waters. Unfortunately for their victims, they happen to be officials and soldiers instead of hack journalists. The harm which they are doing lies almost beyond description.

To introduce you to them, I'll begin by explaining that every two or three days, both in Brazzaville and in Kinshasa, the respective capitals of the two Congos, I used to get arrested. It might for instance have happened that I'd taken a picture of some delighted little boy standing against a blank wall. —and, by the way, the reason why photography will figure so prominently in these anecdotes is simply that the operation of a camera tended to be my first public transaction in any place, and, try as they might, my pals couldn't really get me before I appeared. Sometimes opening a notebook was enough to get me in trouble; often my white skin set them off; enough. The shutter closed; the boy shrieked a laugh. Although no warnings or prohibitions were posted, and although the police had been indifferently fanning themselves in their dark doorway for hours while I went about my business with much the same innocence of a child, I was now to be informed that the blank wall, indeed, this street, was a high-security area: Monsieur, you have now caused a problem, an extremely grave problem. —How about that, I proudly said. They marched me through the dark doorway. Under the circumstances, they would need to confiscate my camera. It was the *chef de police* himself who informed me of this necessity, and from a very special quality of slow-moving, patient implacability in his face I began to comprehend that all this might seriously delay my lunch. Off-green helmets were stacked upside-down in three columns. I counted them. I counted them twice. There were twenty-nine. The policeman in off-green studied each page of my passport through a magnifying glass, while the policeman in camouflage paced thoughtfully back and forth, right hand on the trigger guard of his low-slung machine gun, which remained at all time half-pointed at me. I asked him how many bullets presently resided in the banana clip, and he stared. Around his neck he wore Zeiss miniature binoculars which I imagine him to have confiscated from somebody richer and cleaner than himself. Still farther from the window, through which at the very beginning the *chef de police* had gazed wisely out at the Congo River, four bunk beds could barely be discerned in the hot darkness, and on the lowest and closest of these, a young policeman lay very slowly rereading a handwritten letter within a transparent plastic envelope. He never looked at me, but sometimes he joked or chatted with his two colleagues. The one with the magnifying glass arose, glared into my eyes, closed my passport and then locked it into a rusty box. The one with the machine gun strode very close now, in his stare a mercilessness which I'll call inhuman simply because I once read something similar in the huge eyes of a doe elk

who was charging me because I must have inadvertently trespassed on her calving grounds; she saw me but did not recognize me as myself. I was an alien threat. She meant to harm me. This non-recognition had been conveyed to me by each of the four policemen in his own fashion. The fourth, the *chef de police*, had now vanished into the back room with my protector and occasional translator, proud, moody, jet-black, roundfaced, bespectacled little Monsieur Franck, whose father had five wives but who himself for the sake of modernity had married only one while reclining with a certain number of others, I'd say perhaps five to seven per week; and I could hear the voices of Monsieur Franck and the *chef de police* rising higher and higher as they argued about the price. Eventually they settled on ten thousand Central African francs, or about fourteen dollars; but as soon as Monsieur Franck had come to receive my approval and then counted out his own money so that my wallet would not be seen, the *chef de police* increased the ransom to twenty-five thousand. Now I could see how it was going to be. I told the *chef de police* (or rather whispered to Monsieur Franck to tell him, for to protect decorum we all had to pretend that nothing was going on in the back room) that I absolutely could not go about twenty-five thousand, that if they insisted I would leave my camera with them and forget it, that I was a poor man who'd sleep on the street tonight, and all the other things which I could think of to convey that the bargain, having been closed and reclosed, must be honored. In response to my implication of bad faith, the *chef de police* replied that the ten thousand had been only for the service, while the twenty-five thousand was for the complete service. With camera, passport and most of my money, I quitted them at last. After I paid they did not become any friendlier, the way they would have done in Cambodia or Madagascar. No; they didn't like me; I suppose they wondered how much harder they could have squeezed me. —and whether indeed they ought to let me go at all; why not squeeze me again? This was the reason why as soon as we had turned the corner, Monsieur Franck advised me to run, so we fled into the snake-infested grass, transecting the perimeter of a hidden soldiers' camp one of whose occupants now began to follow us, wearing a distant, moody expression; when we regained the dirt streets of *centre-ville*, we jumped into the first taxi we saw, rounded half a dozen fast corners, then lunched at a pizzeria all of whose beers were cold and all of whose waitresses were prostitutes from the other Congo across the river, the Democratic Republic (formerly called Zaire) at whose skyscrapers the *chef de police* had gazed; and there, too, I also got arrested from time to time for such felonies as photographing a street vendor at his own request, in my vest pocket a duly signed and stamped document emblazoned with my passport-sized likeness. —a real work of art, in short, for which the immigration authorities in Kinshasa had charged me two hundred dollars and for which they'd given me a receipt for one hundred. To save time and trouble to all parties they'd forged my signature on the application forms, or rather invented it, for it resembled no signature at all except perhaps a crazed Arabic calligrapher's; hence while we were wait-

ing for the cassava and flyspecked river-fish to arrive at the expensive restaurant where I had to take them for lunch (was it from this or some other delicacy that I have gained the ongoing superhuman power to shit blood?), they set me to practicing the game, forging the forgery until they were all satisfied. Then they smiled and clapped my shoulder. Thus I had reason to believe that I'd done everything right. Unfortunately, because an out-of-focus somebody had strolled past on the far side of the street not long after I'd completed my exposure, the accreditation became voided. A machine gun barrel clinked against my lens, and the men in blue paraded me away in triumphant indignation, two before and two behind, while sweaty crowds watched with warily sadistic interest. We turned into a hot alley which became a piss-stained tunnel, then entered an office the size of a large closet, a dark, rancid, extremely hot little kingdom whose humidity infused my clothes to a state of soddenness several orders of magnitude in excess of that of the ordinary Congo air, which was almost water, or, I should say, almost blood; it felt as if it were the temperature of blood although it usually wasn't, not quite; it simultaneously supported and enervated the body like warm fluid. Inside the police station, on the other hand, ink began to run from several of the visas of my passport, and the money in my wallet became instantly mildewed as did the wallet itself, and as soon as I'd wiped my forehead on my dripping sleeve it was time to wipe it again. The *chef de police*, Monsieur Roger Samba, sat behind his desk beneath a portrait of the murdered Kabila, whose son had now been President for a good three months and whose picture I never saw in any public place, not even in the embassy. Monsieur Samba explained that not only had I failed to obtain permission from the out-of-focus somebody before removing my lens cap, but (and this was still more serious) in each district of Kinshasa one must first telephone the local police station for authorization to photograph. (There was no telephone in that station.) As it happened, my difficulties on this occasion, which lasted for about three hours, were solved without payment of any "special tax," thanks to the intervention of a passerby who conveniently turned out to be a plainclothesman of the secret police. In his company the four gun-toters escorted me to another even filthier police station and then to the Hôtel de Ville, where the *chef de sécurité* for the entire Democratic Republic of Kinshasa, on whose desk a sign advised: ATTENTION: GOD IS WATCHING YOU, signed the reverse sheet of my accreditation in his very own hand and informed me that for my own safety, although I wouldn't ever see them, friendly spies would now accompany me on every street, day or night, anywhere I went. Thanking him for this threat, I inquired what exactly I should do when photographing street scenes when not every member of a crowd could be asked for permission beforehand. — "The answer is simple, Monsieur," he replied. "Don't take any such pictures." Alas, this wisdom-pearl had been cast before a journalistic swine.

The doorway to Monsieur Samba's den was flanked on one side by a long table behind which sat half a dozen grubby policemen in mismatched uniforms, and on

the other by a dark cage of lattice-work through which sallow palms groped at the light. The cries of these prisoners haunted me. The policemen at the table had refused my request to give them a few Congolese francs. It was hardly remarkable that in a country where the police and the soldiers were themselves such wretched beggars (by twos and threes they'd approach people in the street, entreating and threatening: "*Papa, donnez-moi l'argent!*"—"Papa, give me money!"), prisoners would be worse off. But what especially horrified me in both Congos was the gratuitous cruelty with which the prisoners were treated. I remember one police station in Brazzaville into which while innocuously twiddling my thumbs on the street I dispatched the ever ready Monsieur Franck with instructions to negotiate the price of photographing a prisoner or two. The previous three police stations had turned me down, in spite of my brand-new, just-purchased and laminated card from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was supposed to make me "invulnerable, just like an ambassador" (cost: ten thousand Central African francs), so I'd told Monsieur Franck to search his memory for out-of-the-way police stations, and this was the result. Luckily, the *chef de police* was out. The *sous-chef* agreed in a twinkling. In the filthy cell he displayed the prisoner, a scared, silent street thief, as if he were a trophy-fish, pulling him up by the chin, then shaking him, kicking him, thrusting him down to the concrete, kicking him again... An instant later he wondered whether he had really done the prudent thing (his wondering being dangerous to me, which was why Monsieur Franck and I got the hell away from there), but one of his officers reassured him; the man was a sorcerer; he'd make sure that my photos didn't come out.

With the aid of a certain immigration inspector whom I had in my pocket (or perhaps I should say that he had his hand in my pocket), I made my cautious return through the street stalls of Kinshasa to Monsieur Samba's kingdom, where, the immigration inspector having first offered evidence of my lack of hard feelings (in Monsieur Franck's words: "Ha, ha! They take your money, and then their authority becomes *soft*, you know!"), my request to interview the *chef* and a prisoner or two was granted with alacrity. Moreover, my accreditation was now so perfectly in order that no one even asked to see it.

"What's your greatest difficulty here?"

"Lack of material, lack of transport," said Monsieur Samba, drumming on the desk in irritation. Perhaps I'd already gotten my money's worth. Five thousand Congolese francs, I think it was. —but no doubt the immigration inspector had kept his commission.

"What do you most often arrest people for?"

"Simply theft."

"Why do they steal?"

"Chiefly for food. Many are hungry always." (Here I could not forbear to remember the hungry, threatening soldiers I saw every day: "*Papa, donnez-moi l'argent!*")

Some of the other policemen now put in that in their view the main reason that everything in Kinshasa was so slow, irregular and difficult (I wish I could describe to you the endless waiting for *anything*, the conversations which invariably turned either mendicant or resentful) was the civil war, which had interrupted production and especially food supplies from rebel-held districts. Their opinions were correct, for when I took a U.N. flight to the insurgent town of Goma a few days later I found an abundance of food; moreover, in Goma the Congolese franc held its own much better against the dollar, the exchange rate in government territory being two hundred and fifty to one, and in rebel territory one hundred and forty to one.² (“Do you ever catch rebels in the market?” I asked Monsieur Samba. —“We used to all the time. But then some local people burned them alive, so they don’t come anymore.”)³ But let’s forget about Goma for the moment, with all its lava, cacti and hanging vines; because now, at a nod from Monsieur Samba, a couple of skinny, submissive prisoners are brought in from the cage to squat on the greasy concrete floor in the same place where I had stood so apprehensively the previous day. Their handwritten tickets of arrest were laid out on Monsieur Samba’s desk, but I was not permitted to photograph these documents. The one nearest to me had stolen some kitchenware in hopes of selling it for food; after being released he stole a pair of sneakers.

“How long have you been in the cage this time?”

“A week,” he said, but at this, several policemen began to shout at him most threateningly, and then he remembered that he’d been in custody for only a day.

The interview was finished, except for a few photographs. —now back into the cage with them! Now let’s visit another cage, actually a small, square room with a broken television, holes in the ceiling from the civil war, a floral curtain behind which the family slept (“*c’est moi, ma femme et notre bébé*”), and a padlock on the door for security. This was the house of my immigration inspector, one of the few who was genuinely kind. It’s even possible that if my money had run out prematurely, he would have protected me from his colleagues, although it’s better never to test other human beings to destruction. He always did what he could for me; after my difficulties with Monsieur Samba, he tried to get me still another card to boost the power of my accreditation another notch; and when that didn’t work out, he served me up one of his female colleagues instead. He lived far, far away. It took him forever to get to work every day on the insanely crowded, unreliable taxi-brousses. Because his wife was out, and she possessed the one key, he was embarrassed, and so he ripped the padlock off the door to let me in. So much for security.

“I’m inspector of immigration; I’m a big person. And look at me. Look at this. You heard that *chef de police* tell you that before 6 August 1998 our franc was thirty to the dollar. My salary has not changed. My wife and I used to have an apartment in town, but we couldn’t keep it. Now we live out here. No one profits from this war. Some say that a group of whites is behind it. If so, only they profit.”

That very day, April 24, 2001, a white man, a diplomat, was sitting at a table

in an air-conditioned room with the blue flag of the United Nations behind him, and as the journalists raised their hands and the photographers and videographers crawled abjectly around him, he spoke of that war, of "laying the problem on the table," of sincerity, of perseverance, of complexity (his voice rising and falling in eloquent cadences in that cool and echoing room), of disarmament, a fundamental turn, "*le dialogue inter-Congolais*," so that we could make things better, "*et peut-être, tourner le grande page pour Afrique*." Forget Africa; he'd need to turn a pretty grand page for the Congo alone, that malarial paradise subdivided into its very different zones each one of which lay subject to its own "special taxes." Over on the west side of the river, the Republic of Congo had endured no less than three civil wars already since 1993, which was why in Brazzaville, lime trees, bullet-pocked houses, calm-voiced children, golden-green flies and sunlight dissolved one another into a most peculiar dream. A boy sat shucking snowpeas in the shade of a scorched post office. Young enough for Monsieur Franck to call him "*mon petit*," he'd seen many, many corpses in the streets during the second and third wars; they'd been shot "for fun," he supposed, or else out of tribal hatred. The last cease-fire had taken effect on Christmas 1999. Most people I asked suspected that there'd be another civil war in five or ten years. Meanwhile, Brazzaville's half-dirt streets exuded a weirdly rural feeling, for the government remained even now nominally socialist, with the odd hammer and sickle monument or Che Guevara poster clinging to existence here and there, so that in spite of the new oil sales, "development" had to a large extent occurred only in the Maoist sense. Tree-topped village of concrete houses, infinite-hearthed kitchen whose smoldering braziers mirrored the heat of the sun, Brazza was a backwater, to be sure, but it was safe and convenient, the "special taxes" of the police were reasonable, except perhaps to poor travelers from Kinshasa;⁴ and the soldiers mostly restrained themselves from minding other peoples' business. Brazza was even beautiful, like its tall Congolese women who wore colors as spectacular as the plumage of parakeets. Vines flowering over bombed edifices transmuted ruin into picturesque decrepitude. As for Kinshasa, although that city had not been nearly so damaged by fighting. —for instance, it suffered less often from the almost cyclic dimming of lights and quieting of air conditioners which occurred every night in Brazza, where forty percent of the electrical system was destroyed (and, moreover, Kinshasa offered multistory apartments and office towers to the gaze of that *chef de police* in Brazzaville who'd gazed so wisely across the river on that humid Sunday morning when he was calculating the most Solomonian possible ransom for my camera). —everybody agreed that life was worse in Kinshasa, where people were poorer and prices were higher. ("Zaireans are like Mexicans in my country," said Monsieur Franck. "They will do anything. Most of my girlfriends" [he meant paid girlfriends] "are Zairean. They don't care. Even about condoms they don't care.") And if Kinshasa's Congo had endured only one civil war to Brazza's three, that war had been terrible and was now merely suspended, not resolved, and that suspension

thanks only to the United Nations's patiently expensive efforts. I asked a woman who'd fled across the river to Brazza what she remembered of her country, and she said, "Nothing but running and shooting."

2

When after a hot and dreary wait in Brazzaville I was finally granted my visa for the Democratic Republic of Congo, I asked the consul, in whose office a portrait of the assassinated Kabila continued to prevail, where I ought to go, what I should see. He said that three foreign armies (in other words, the rebel forces) continued to occupy the eastern half of his country. If I went to Goma, I could find some "autodefensists," some resistance to the foreign occupation. I decided to take his advice. But that meant starting from Kinshasa. So for the first time I took the boat across the Congo River, the river white as sunshine on a sweaty forehead, stinking water, dead and oily mirror; and for me this voyage began and ended in an atmosphere of confusion approaching fear, because it was the first time that I saw what can best be described as *the boiling*.

Perhaps you have read about the subways of Tokyo, where people pack themselves obediently into claustrophobically confined spaces, sometimes with the aid of a professional nudger, each passenger correctly trusting that everybody else's orderliness and courteousness will allow him to get out again. I have tried this, and it really isn't so bad. Now imagine a much smaller, hotter, dirtier, darker space; imagine that some people don't have the fare but are trying to force themselves through anyhow; imagine that all the others fear that the conveyance will leave without them and that there may not be another one; further, imagine that each entrance and each exit is occluded by officials whose job and joy is to extract a tax, and in some cases a "special tax" surcharge, from everybody possible; and please imagine that each entrance and each exit is so narrow that only one-way traffic can pass, and that unfortunately each entrance is also the exit. Imagine that these officials are ill-trained, ill-tempered and underpaid, and that most of them are armed with whips.

Taut, sweaty brownish-black faces seethed down the narrow, mesh-walled gang-planks. Dark skin, clothed in the brightest possible assemblage of hues (golden stars in a turquoise paisley, red and yellow striped chemises with violet orchids in the yellownesses, blue trousers patterned with green goblets) shouted and sometimes screamed. What a boiling, boiling crowd! Somewhere, an unseen body shoved, and all the rest of us in this hysterical mass of sweaty flesh were slammed backward. Kicks and punches now traveled forward again with electric speed, and we lurched along until the next blow while soldiers bellowed with rage, forcing us into one narrow booth after another, within which even the official who ruled it could hardly move. Meanwhile, everybody had to have his documents literally in hand at all times, because there was no telling who would want what when, and whether the

sweating cursing giant who'd just collected a handful of passports would ever give them back, because we were shoved along down the next chute, ready with our exit tax receipts, currency declarations (on which form it was absolutely necessary for me to lie every time, to protect myself from the thieving bastards ahead) and yellow fever inoculation certificates (forgeries of which could be purchased in five minutes for a thousand Central African francs at the very beginning). Here came our passports, safe back in hand, in exchange for a special tax which varied every time... A last series of shoves and contractions, and each flesh-globule oozed as well as it could up a ladder whose rungs dripped with mud and excrement. All that was embarkation. Packed on the boat so tightly that only the lucky firstcomers could sit down, the flesh awaited disembarkation, which would be worse.

At Kinshasa the gangplank was down, protected by its metal gratings and its barbed wire. Men twisting screaming women's breasts, men pushing men, soldiers brutally kicking, pushing and punching, these human beings, their acts, and the staggering rush of that column of flesh squeezed by narrowness and aggression into a state of almost liquid extrusion, vividly illustrated for me Monsieur Franck's favorite phrase: *the struggle for life*. Many people fell, and when they fell the ones they fell on had to fall likewise. Now *two* streams of flesh were squeezing past each other in that same introitus, for the Brazza-bound passengers had already begun fighting for their places on the boat. A man shoved a little boy against the dirty barbed wire, probably not intentionally, and the boy screamed and began to bleed. The shouting of the soldiers was terrifying. Wondering how I would keep them from tearing off my clothes and ravishing all my money away from me, I found myself now descending the shitty ladder, kicked and shoved from behind, almost falling, while ahead the biggest men were shouldering each other aside. Whenever people tried to swarm up over the sides of the chute, police flogged them with flexible rods. I saw them strip a man's shirt off and begin to beat him. Submissively, he raised his hands. They bound his wrists with rope. Now they were punching a woman again and again in the side of the head. At first she was shouting, and then she was just taking it. They dragged her off to the side; she too had been arrested. Meanwhile the swarm made its semiliquid way, documents ready whenever it had them, bales, bundles and bags on its sweating heads, each flesh-atom straining to get through. At certain egresses, single file prevailed, and then another gate, another tax station would demarcate the recommencement of undifferentiated, herded flesh, deep brown, and sometimes jet black, the featureless of the mass resembling Congo jungle as seen from the air.—namely, so crammed, leafed and tree-crowned in its blue-greenness that it might as well have been nothing; there was no detail since there was nothing but detail, no beginning and no end. And now I had made it as far as the second single file, and not far ahead I could see the real meat-grinder, where people were getting inspected, opening their bundles, bracing themselves to pay they knew not what special tax. What should I do? There was only one answer: Pay a high but fair spe-

cial tax to one official who'd save me from the others! This is what I did, and my new friend, my dear new friend, the immigration inspector I've told you about, shouted: "Diplomat!", so that everyone had to make way for me, although they cried out with rage.

O special taxes! You must be holy, for you are certainly infinite. I'll recapitulate one merest subsegment: My new friends take all my local currency when I leave Kinshasa's exhaust-smells and broken wheelbarrows behind, because it's illegal to export Congolese francs. Never mind; they'll keep it for me until I come back from Brazza. I come back. Unfortunately, they've had to spend it all on special taxes to benefit me. They can't give me a receipt. Never mind. They'll explain over lunch. Back to the same expensive restaurant of river-fish garnished with flies. There are four of them today and of course I must pay. —Why so many? As a man in Goma once said, "In Africa the problem of nepotism is inevitable due to poverty. My brother *must* help me to finish with my misery and my poverty." Good enough. I must pay. But how can I pay? I don't have any Congolese francs! They eat and depart one by one, until only the *chef de police* remains. He's as small and silent as a Congo mosquito. When the bill arrives, I explain my little difficulty. Never mind; he'll change money for me if I hold the fort here. My small bills having long since been gnawed away by special taxes, I have no recourse except to give him a hundred dollar note. If I exited this concertina-wire-topped courtyard alone, God only knows what the soldiers and other thieves would do to me. "*Papa, papa, donnez-moi l'argent!*" So I send him on his errand, and then I wait. After an hour I telephone one of his colleagues to report that I have a little problem. The colleague arrives; the *chef de police* arrives with my Congolese francs, perhaps a thinner wad of them than is really fair, but at least he came back; and so I can pay the bill and tell the colleague that I don't have any problem at all, and then all four of them are here again to bring me to a hotel they're sure I'll like; at first it was twenty dollars but by the time they've finished helping me it's gone up to thirty-two dollars, and if I don't like it, why, I'll be in their power when I want to leave the country.

So I had my friends, my literally dear friends. The coldest of them, who worked in the *section de sécurité*, called me his dear brother. Across the street from a waist-high mountain of fruit rinds, he explained that he needed fifty dollars for his bride's dowry. I slipped him twenty. The very next day, when I made the crossing from Brazzaville again, everything was so easy that I wondered how I could have imagined that anybody (anybody legitimate, that is; anybody who'd obediently paid his special tax) could meet with difficulties. And, really, how could those flagellators, extortionists and woman-punchers be blamed? Ha, ha! Just consider their tricks elaborations of *the struggle for life*. (On the Brazza side, a frontier guard in camouflage fatigues menaced some men with his whip, chasing them almost playfully. The closest one leapt gleefully into the filthy water, then swam beneath the gangway to hide. Tranquility being restored, the guard left the other men alone. An instant

later, one of them sold him a plastic bag of drinking water.)

Away from their cattle-pens, tax-booths and crowd-chutes, existence didn't seem to improve. Have you ever seen a sugar cube overwhelmed by ants? Thus appeared each bus or *taxi-brousse* in Kinshasa, riders clinging to roof, doorway and windowsills, even hanging out the back, their legs swaying with every turn; and of course some people were fighting, shouting, punching. (Lack of transport, Monsieur Samba had said.) Ride in a taxi (assuming that you were lucky enough to find one), and when it stopped at an intersection, even with you and a lot of passengers in it, two or three determined souls will attempt to thrust themselves in through the windows. (A broken-windowed taxi sputtered to a halt on the potholed street, and instantly people came running and boiling, trying to negotiate with the driver, enraged at whomever'd gotten there first.) This was why people always proved late for appointments, why the immigration inspector who'd broken the padlock took ages to get home to his wife every night, and one never forgot the equatorial heat which slowed down everything even better while ripening any number of arguments into street fights. Go to a restaurant, where one thing or another wouldn't be on the menu, so you'd finally order a hamburger, which was all they actually had, and you'd wait and sit in stifling hot darkness for half an hour because the power had failed, and after another half hour they finally admitted that since the kitchen was electrified there wouldn't be any hamburger coming. Your friends from the police would need a drink, so you'd all sit at a cafe and order a soda, waiting maybe forty minutes until it came out that they didn't have any sodas and the vendor to whom they'd sent a boy hoping to buy them didn't have any, either. Nobody had enough of anything. Hence Kinshasa was a city of sad-eyed shufflers who thrust socks, bananas or belts in everyone's faces; of female meat which ubiquitously offered itself for rent; no, Kinshasa wasn't a limp city by any means; for the shouting, angry voices rarely ceased, although often they weren't really angry at all, only emphatic; I myself sometimes wondered whether the only defense might be to act constantly suspicious or angry, which I refused to do; others certainly did it; well, maybe it was the heat, and certainly it was *the struggle for life*. Take a photograph from the third-floor balcony of your hotel, and within three minutes, two grubby little policeboys whose breaths stink of hunger would have burst into your room; your accreditation turned valueless once again; you were under arrest; they must escort you to the station for a shakedown; but the hotel manager uttered strong words, and they slunk away; this time they must find their living elsewhere. I got plenty of attention, to be sure; yet here more than any country I've ever been, except possibly the United States, strangers remained indifferent strangers, such as the silent brown girl at the slanted table on which stood a half-empty beer bottle and a completely empty cigarette pack neither of which was hers; I sat next to her for an hour and we never said a word to each other, while the policeman from whom I'd requested advice on a hotel within walking distance and who instead had stood with

me for half an hour to get an express taxi, then taken me to six hotels the first five of which were all full, was now whispering with the reception clerk, inflating my tariff before collecting whatever special tax he could for all his service; he promised to return the next day, and so in the morning I changed my hotel. The policeman came down and sat next to me and the brown girl. For three quarters of a sweaty hour we discussed the quality and price of his service. The brown girl stared into space.

Most emblematic of all to me, more so than the prison cages (the majority of the Congolese not being *that* wretched)⁵ were the markets, which were crowded and overcrowded by bright plastic buckets and stands whose canopies had faded to the same dirty gray as the shirts of the beggar-boys; a man made the rounds, wearily offering everybody in sight CLINITOL POUR VOTRE MAISON ET TOILETTE. Another man offered watches which glared in the sun as he thrust them in every face. Somebody shouted at him, and at once a dozen women were all shouting. (Not long before, half of them had been yelling: "Make love with me, white man!") A lady in a long yellow dress of flowers sat beneath a parasol and slowly moved her hands in swimming motions, for it was hot and hotter; a woman's ragged shirt was sticking to her sweaty breasts... Everything dark hurt to touch; people merely *existed* in that heat, like lizards, paying a special tax of consciousness, purposefulness, ready for nothing but rage. A man in a ragged striped shirt was trying to sell everybody plastic hangers. —"*Tais, Papa,*" said a taxi driver wearily. Leave me alone, Daddy. A woman turned and turned her bale of plastic shoes, trying to make it look inviting as sweat dripped from her face. Suddenly there were cries and shouts. A thief had made off with some of the watch-vendor's stock. The tempo of the entire market became agitated, angry, then half subsided, voices remaining louder than before. Now two women began fighting over a plastic tub. —no; they were only bargaining. The vendeuse righteously defended her price, while the customer literally showed teeth; another woman darted in to separate them. Now the market-voices had quieted down again to their accustomed weary murmur. The argument between the two women dragged on and on. And then, without any warning, they were striking each other, at which their neighbors came yelling and shrieking...

3

In Kinshasa, at least, the story goes that when Kabila *père*, the assassinated one, took power, he had helpers from Uganda, Eritrea and especially Rawanda. Having installed himself, he told his allies to go home, now preferring the assistance of Angola. As the immigration inspector put it (my on-the-spot, woodenly literal translation): "The foreign soldiers didn't accept it. Maybe they needed diamonds, for instance. So they started shooting."

"In your opinion, then, the insurgent movement in the east is just a puppet of

outside forces?"

"Exactly. Rawandans are the worst. Rebels from Rawanda, it's easy to recognize them from their appearance. We have a facility to see them. They have a morphology. They're thin and tall. *When we see them, we kill them,*" he said with sudden shocking emphasis, and I remember how Monsieur Samba had smilingly mentioned the burning alive of rebels in the public market. "They know there are riches in our country..."

So that was the version in the government zone, which I naturally assumed to be untrue. Existence in Kinshasa was so difficult, the special taxes both literal and metaphorical so high, that a violent struggle for a better life could only be expected. At that time the country was fairly evenly divided between the Kabila regime and the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), which had in turn split into two not quite mutually repulsive factions. Thanks to the United Nations,⁶ whose efforts both sides praised, the front line was fairly quiet; throughout my stay in the Congo, the only reported war-violence of note involved the murder of four Red Cross workers by unknown persons in the RCD zone. I don't know exactly what I expected to find on the other side of the line—fewer special taxes, perhaps. Well, well; some journalists never learn.

The old Soviet cargo plane happened to pause that day in Kisangani, a front-line town more or less at the equator, so I wandered around the airport for an hour. A truckload of insurgents sat parked in the sun, and these, all armed and some armed literally to the teeth, stared at me without a great deal of cordiality. Indeed, their gazes reminded me again of that doe elk's eyes. I turned my back on them and strolled in another direction. Grubbily uniformed in camouflage, a slender young girl soldier, possibly a Bantu pygmy, squatted by a ruined wall, watching me with—well, not doe eyes, exactly, maybe lizard eyes, for she basked, and her eyelids were half-closed, and she rarely blinked, and my presence didn't seem to impress her. The wall said:

RWANDA BEHIND IN THIS FREEDOM OF LIBERATING ZAIRE
KEEP THAT SPIRIT
LONG LIVE UGANDA

which made me wonder whether the denunciations I'd heard in the government might be truth-grained. How I would have liked to photograph those slogans! But something told me, I know not what, that my two hundred dollar accreditation from Kinshasa might not avail me here.

Sitting all in a row on a concrete step, boys with uniforms and boys without, boys with machine guns and boys without, all surveyed me, and I knew that another special tax had just come due. Fortunately, all they wanted was cigarettes. Poor Monsieur Franck, whom I'd dragged with me even here, since a translator from Kinshasa would hardly have fared well in RCD territory but who had been long

since rendered essentially incapable of translation, thanks to exhaustion and stress, had a pack of cigarettes, so he glumly passed them all out after I promised to pay him back. After that, the rebel boys wanted money "for uniforms." They didn't ask in the half-whining, half-threatening "*donnez-moi l'argent, Papa!*" of Kabila's soldiers; they were all threat. Realizing that should I give in to this I'd be sunk, I laughed them off and strode away, with Monsieur Franck muttering, "Oh, but they are very *dangerous*, you see, Mr. William!"

I wanted to photograph the girl soldier if I could find a private place to do it where the rebels wouldn't see me and arrest me. I was getting ever so tired of being arrested. So, lurking in a semi-secluded niche between two small planes, I dispatched Monsieur Franck to negotiate. She was willing, my money permitting. She spoke hardly any French at all; Franck had to communicate with her in lingala. This made him certain that she was from Rwanda. When I paid her fifty Congolese francs, she stared at the banknote as if she'd never seen it before, which confirmed him in his impression, but later I found out that the Kabila government, cutting off its nose to spite its face, had changed the colors of all denominations higher than twenty francs, in order to render the old money worthless to the insurgents. The RCD had then in its turn proclaimed that possession of the new currency was a criminal offense. So the girl scurried off with the felonious money to report me to her commander, at which point I, not quite getting the gist but disliking and dreading this turn of events, hastened back to the U.N. plane with Monsieur Franck (who kept moodily repeating, "Very *dangerous*, Mr. William!") and into that plane we prudently vanished.

An hour later the plane landed in Goma on the Rwandan frontier. A volcano stood blue on the horizon. The coolly sticky air was rubbery like a mosquito.

Son excellence at the Department of Public Information was sleeping, they said, but after long pounding at the gates of his mansion on that rainy twilight, a boy soldier, mercurially friendly and aggressive, came, took my name, and finally ushered me onto the grounds of the grand house. *Son excellence* stood gazing down at me from the front steps. Finally he inclined himself a little, lowering his hand to my level for me to shake. He studied my press card with dreamy disdain. And then, and then, and *then*, it was time once again for accreditation, not at his house (and indeed I never saw him again) but on the official premises, where weary old soldiers paced murmuringly through the echoing corridors of this former bank. After a long wait, the *chef de sécurité* arrived, with several deputies. The formalities now continued in the bank's basement, everything being said in low whispery voices, everyone tiptoeing creepily around, indicating with languid fingers to whom I must present my passport, to whom I should give three photographs, to whom I ought to present the application filled out in duplicate, and to whom I must now pay a hundred and fifty United States dollars in immaculate bills, while the rain trickled outside. They were very clean, very well dressed, these RCD men, resembling the bank clerks they'd

supplanted. The *chef de sécurité*, whose handshake was a brush of fingers as cold as spider-legs, whispered at last that I need not pay the hundred and fifty dollars for Monsieur Franck in this case, since I was in serious financial need as I'd woefully explained; *pas de problème*; Monsieur Franck would simply remain confined to his room at the Hotel de Masques, in which case, in their friendly words, "nothing would happen to him." Every now and then in the ensuing days, somebody tempted him to step outside, but he prudently refused. I set him up with a tab at the hotel restaurant, and he spent his time on Rosicrucian meditations, his salary on certain friendly young ladies whom agents directed his way.

"How about Mr. Franck?" I asked my new translator, who'd been specially recommended by the *chef de sécurité*. "He's a prisoner here. Do you care about that?"

Unsmiling, he looked at Monsieur Franck and said, "I don't care."

I was now free to commence journalistic operations at once, subject only to a trifling little appointment at the Direction Général de la Sécurité Intérieure at eight o'clock sharp the following morning, an appointment first involving grubby boys who menaced me with their machine guns, demanding that I leave all my valuables with them while my new "translator" stood aloof. After I explained that if he failed to protect me from their depredations I would be obliged to fire him and pay his salary to someone else, he mustered a few limp words of lingala to allow me safe passage through the gate, into the courtyard, and finally into the antechamber for a long wait and a politic flirt with the at-first forbidding semi-literate little secretary, who wore six elephant-ivory bracelets and who squealed with joy when I allowed her to beat me at tic-tac-toe. Next they led me through various offices of annoyed and suspicious individuals who finally passed me on to the Director of Security, who wasn't at all the same as last night's *chef de sécurité* and who held me for a long time, considering me very evasive and worrisome because I would not pin down the exact politics of *Men's Journal* or the interests of its owners. Whom then had *Men's Journal* supported during the last Presidential election, he wanted to know. I said that I was not aware, nor did I care, exactly who owned the magazine, at which he smiled with disgust, warning me not to be "overconfident." Trying again, I explained that in America everything and everyone was owned by corporations whose only politics was money, and that *Men's Journal*, its owners, editors, advertisers, publishers and readers didn't much care about politics as long as I could squeeze in a little cheap sensationalism here and there.⁷ If there was no war to report, then men or preferably women with guns and uniforms would have to serve my turn. I reminded him that I too needed to collect my own special tax in order to live. As a second-rate opportunist from a country of people most of whom couldn't even find the continent of Africa on a map, I could be an ideal, value-neutral, utterly amoral vehicle to transmit his movement's message without fear or favor directly to the ignorant. At this, he finally began to thaw. He let me go at lunch time. Since I really did want to meet soldiers, lunch (at which the waitress expressed such intense romantic and sexual

longing for my body, my soul and my wallet that she even escorted me to the toilet) was followed by a three-hour wait at the department of military communications, affectionately known as G-5. In still another of their offices, a commander in camouflage demanded in the most jovial possible spirit why I had been so selfish as to relax by myself last night, while the sad military correspondent in the rain-patterned uniform and the horn-rimmed spectacles sat on a table-edge, making careful notes about me on his steno pad. For the fourth time he asked me which journal I represented, and thoughtfully wrote it down.

And why was I so set on this particular project? Well, a civilian had already confided to me: "The problem in this area is, if you try to ask any person what he thinks of the RCD movement, he's going to express his opinion due to the presence of Rwandan troops."

Assuming a baffled look, I said, "And tell me, sir, just what that opinion might be."

He cleared his throat, looked both ways, and said, "When you go into the areas where minerals are exploited, you will notice that before you exploit the minerals you must get permission from Rwanda. And the planes come from Rwanda to the places where the minerals are exploited and they don't have to pay taxes..."

Maybe it wasn't as black-and-white as that fellow stated it, because during the bad old days of the Belgian Congo, many Rwandans (mainly Hutus) found themselves resettled here, so they weren't just imperialists and parasites. As somebody else remarked, "it's difficult to say they have to go back." But the point was that the Rwandan *soldiers* were here (the Ugandans too, although they seemed to be better regarded), and that to a much greater extent than the RCD wished me to believe, they were controlling the affairs of this zone.

Innocently polishing my glasses, I explained to the colonels at G-5 that in order to refute the lying allegations of the Kabila clique, I wished to photograph an assemblage of true-blue Congolese sons of the soil all uniformed and armed ("to show your power to the world," I added). This would prove that there were no Rwandans in charge. At first suspicious of my motives, my new friends eventually waxed enthusiastic, and after several postponements, probably in order to gather a sufficiency of handsome lads and clean uniforms, I got my photo shoot, paying a special tax of twenty dollars to the soldiers for cigarettes, and another twenty dollars to the higher-ups who'd arranged it, so that they wouldn't feel left out. As for the soldierettes they'd promised to the readers of *Men's Journal*, I never saw a single one.

I pause to transmit to you some scraps of an interview with an RCD military spokesman in camouflage, Monsieur Jean de Dieu Mambwene, whose official title was Commandant de la Presse Militaire:

"How many soldiers do you have?"

"Our strength remains a secret."

"What is the balance of force between your side and Kinshasa?"

"The army of the RCD⁸ is stronger. The proof is that when there is fighting we can always win. A battalion of ours can push aside one to two brigades of Kinshasa. The force depends on the objective."

"And what is your objective?"

"From the beginning we were animated by this spirit here, this spirit of change," said Monsieur Mambwene, waving his hands. "Management of the country was not good. Power was snatched by one person, and the proof of this lies in his testament, in which he left all power to his son."

"When do you expect to arrive in Kinshasa?"

"Our objective is not to take it militarily."

"How would you describe the system you desire?"

"We want democracy. That's the first democracy. And the freedom of expression..."

"Do you have any comment about the presence of the Rawandans and the Ugandans?"

"To be frank, we are with them. No rebellion ever started without an ally."

"Fair enough. What is the best thing that the U.S. can do to help you?"

"Stay neutral, so that we can build the country. If they support any one party, this war could take centuries."

4

Reader, wouldn't you rather hear all this from the horse's mouth? The President of the RCD, Doctor Adolphe Onosumba Yemba, was the third person to hold the grand dignity, which he'd possessed for six months. According to my new translator, he was "a really good guy." After a cursory search of my belongings I was admitted with my now customary escort of soldiers to his walled compound on the shore of Lake Kivu. A journalist from *Le Monde* was just leaving. We seated ourselves outside at a long table covered with a colorful and fairly clean cloth.

He was a big man in a flowing purple gown. His head was close-cropped as befitted his military qualities. He had a gentle way of speaking, an almost dreamy manner of voice and gesture, perhaps because he was drowsy; maybe I bored him; he kept yawning and yawning. I said that I was sorry to disturb him (or, as one says in French, to "derange" him); I promised not to steal too much of his Sunday, and he replied that that would be good because he wanted to go swimming. Every ten minutes I'd ask him if he was too tired to continue, and he'd give me another five minutes.

Next week he was going to Osaka to sign an accord with the Kabila government.

"We strongly believe in the unity of the country," he told me (and this is his own English). "The sovereignty of the country, that is one of our principles. As for military victory, we have had experience of that many times. We want good government and clear leadership to be established for a new political order with the idea

of power-sharing. After forty years of shameless rule in the Congo, we want..."

He yawned again.

"The American system is the ideal for the Congo," he concluded.

"When will you have achieved your aims?"

"Within five to ten years."

"And what is your opinion of Kabila?"

"We don't fight Kabila as an individual. We are fighting the government," he said, yawning again. "In the past forty years, our Congo has been shamelessly neglected. Kabila and Mbotu did it the wrong way."

He spoke a little vaguely, a bit sleepily, but not unimpressively. His criticisms of the Kabila government, and of Congo misrule generally, were on the mark. Was his movement popular, then?

"Popular, no," said a Baptist pastor, and I regret to say that in Goma I never met anybody except members of the RCD who liked the RCD. "It's a popular movement that doesn't respond to popular need: no concern about social problems, no security, no economy. Yes, they have their positive points, but the negative points outweigh them. In everybody's view, it's a kind of domination."

"Who dominates?" I asked, knowing the answer.

"I fear to name them," he said. We were in my hotel room, and even so, he lowered his voice. "It's because they accepted to go *outside* to look for help. And today they cannot make any decision without consultation *over there*. For instance, that President you speak of can't take any decision unless the Rwandans dictate it. They came themselves to impose him on us. The governor, the mayor, the ministers, whatever, they all have to be sanctioned by Rwanda..."

(In the words of President Doctor Adolphe, "we invited them, and the object of their presence is well known. When the time comes they will go back to their country.")

"In your opinion, who is more free, a person who lives here or someone who lives in the *zone de Kabila*?"

Half whispering in my hotel room, smiling sadly, he said, "I don't know. I haven't been to Kinshasa. All I know is that I'm not free."

Reader, what phrase do you think entered my head just then? *Special tax*.

Oh, special taxes afflict us everywhere, to be sure; even in Brazzaville when somebody paid a restaurant bill the waiter wouldn't bring change unless he asked; when someone changed money, the moneychanger would count out about three-quarters of the proper amount, and then hold back, waiting to see whether the customer knew or cared; then with imperturbable slowness he'd offer another five thousand note, bearing the likeness of a lavender-scarfed brown girl with a basket of cotton on her head, after which he'd desist again, readily grasping other bills in his left hand, but they'd be deployed only on request. The Congo's ripe with collectors of special taxes from the immigration police in the sweltering kennels of Brazzaville who kept warning their protesting "clients" in calm low voices: "*Doucement, douce-*

ment" (softly, softly), to the soldiers in Kinshasa who came up to anyone in clean clothes to say: "*Papa, donnez-moi l'argent!*" In any sort of deal with the taxmen, everything became at once uncertain, protracted, illegal and therefore menacing, obligating the payer to *donner l'argent* to an indefinite but expanding number of leeches. Now, what about special taxes in the lava-cobbled streets of Goma? The Baptist pastor said: "I get no salary, on account of the war. Nowhere is there possibility to pay tuition for my children, although now the parents must pay the teachers and even pay to build the schools. Yet they tax us. From here to cross the province, I must pay for the *laissez-passer*. No way I can go to Bukava freely, because there are so many formalities" (he meant so many special taxes). "I cannot sleep in security, because there are so many taxes..."

He lowered his voice another notch and said: "I had a neighbor ten meters from my house. He disappeared. When somebody dies, there's no way to organize the mourning or tell anyone..."

Smiling with terrifying grief, he clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Why did he disappear, Pastor?"

"If you are wealthy it's a problem. You must pay and pay. Sometimes you are arrested and taken to an unknown place, and when you come back they make you pay again. Well, they came for him."

"Rwandans?"

He nodded. "The Congolese don't do like that. The Congolese let you go if you pay. The Rwandis never let you go."

"Was it day or night?"

"It was the day. His wife is a Tutsi and her husband was a Congolese Hutu, so they say she's complicit. But as an African I don't believe it. Still, when somebody disappears, you must ask where is my husband, but she never did. Maybe she's afraid..."

"And then what happened?"

"When the husband was kidnapped, the wife began to befriend the Tutsi soldiers, I think because they were her brothers," and to me this was the saddest thing, that the pastor could not even give the woman the benefit of the doubt; why couldn't she have been trying to curry favor to get her husband back? "Later, their daughter was killed by the same people, so it was said. The mother knew that her daughter was sleeping with the Tutsi commander. Some say she was joking with a pistol and that's how she died. Others say that the commander killed her for discovering one of his secrets. Some said that since her father was a Hutu, he couldn't trust her in the end..."

"So nobody knows for certain how or why the daughter died."

"That's correct. But she's dead. And her father has never returned."

"In your house, do you fear that somebody might come in, or do you think that if you keep silent you'll be okay?"

And now, far more brightly than the flickering bulb over the dresser, an

immense sadness and terror shone in his eyes. He cleared his throat and said, "Well, the hatred is in their hearts. For example, I have a car and I refuse one of them a lift, and later he will get me. It can be my house, or my watch, or my wife..."

And another man told me about the Congolese taxi driver who'd been flagged down by a Rwandan soldier last December. He took the soldier to the airport, whereupon the soldier killed him and threw his body into the bushes, no one knew why. Perhaps the driver had failed to pay the special tax.

What made these hideous stories even more frightening was the very recent double round of genocide which had occurred in Rwanda: Hutus against Tutsis, and Tutsis against Hutus. The Tutsis, the tall thin ones, were dominant now in the Rwandan army. Many or most of the ethnically Rwandan Congolese in this area were Hutu. And so the great apprehension I heard expressed in Goma was that the Rwandan soldiers, who were already so bitterly resented here, might someday organize a massacre of Hutus throughout the insurgent zone.

"I'm not against the Tutsis," the Baptist pastor had said. "They are out brothers. We've lived with them for years and years, and they accept the Congolese. But I believe they are themselves the source of the hatred here. In Africa, to create a relationship I marry on your side and you marry on my side. Congolese people did this. They took wives from Tutsis. We lived together. We grew up together. We didn't know who was Hutu and who was Tutsi. But after that genocide in 1994 we knew. They started going back to Rwanda when they won the war and we were surprised. Now they are coming back, reoccupying homes they sold us, and paying no compensation—"

Special taxes again! Pay with your money, your house or your life! (One man in Goma told me: "Because of the war, we learned to suffer, and we don't fear anymore." But that wasn't true; he merely wanted it to be true; he was terrified.)

Where in the Congo would *you* most like to live? In the RCD area I met people who literally prayed for Kabila to come. They envied me, because I could go back to Kinshasa. And in Kinshasa the police and customs men awaited their prey in those tiny sweltering rooms where they could do whatever they wanted to do, where they ran their hands over your body, just you and them, and maybe they tried to kiss you, or in that darkness as black as Congo coffee they had you count and recount your money until you made a mistake and they could confiscate it; or they studied the documents for which you'd already paid their colleagues, searching out the absence of a specific permission to do a specific thing which in good faith you'd done (here the feeling I always had was similar to that of covering my body with blankets, clothes and towels from head to toe in a sweaty hotel room, waiting for the mosquitoes to find their way in, which they always did). Special tax! Pick your taxman. You can choose a Rwandan soldier to come in and take your daughter away, or you can choose his Kinshasan equivalent, Monsieur J., let's call him, who smiles his cerebral smile at me after I've slipped him another ten dollars, then (why hadn't

I made it twenty?), leaves me to the mercies of the inspectors, who'd never inspected me before; this time they sweated me down into nervous misery and confiscated some papers from Goma, after which Monsieur J. escorted me to the gangplank, assuring me in excellent English that he'd done his best, meanwhile leading behind him half a dozen scared men to whom he said in almost the same pleasant tones: "Don't ever come to this country again." One of the deportees dared reply, "Don't worry; I don't like your country."—"Shut up!" grinned Monsieur J. "Do you want me to throw you into the water?" After that they lapsed into silence, for the current of the Congo River is strong, and few people hereabouts can swim. —A sub-inspector couldn't find the exit stamp on my passport, and Mr. J. said to him coolly: "Do you need glasses?" —Turning to me with a smile as blinding as sunlight on the edge of a tin roof, "I'm going to come with you to Brazzaville," he said to me with a laugh, and for a moment I was afraid that he really would...



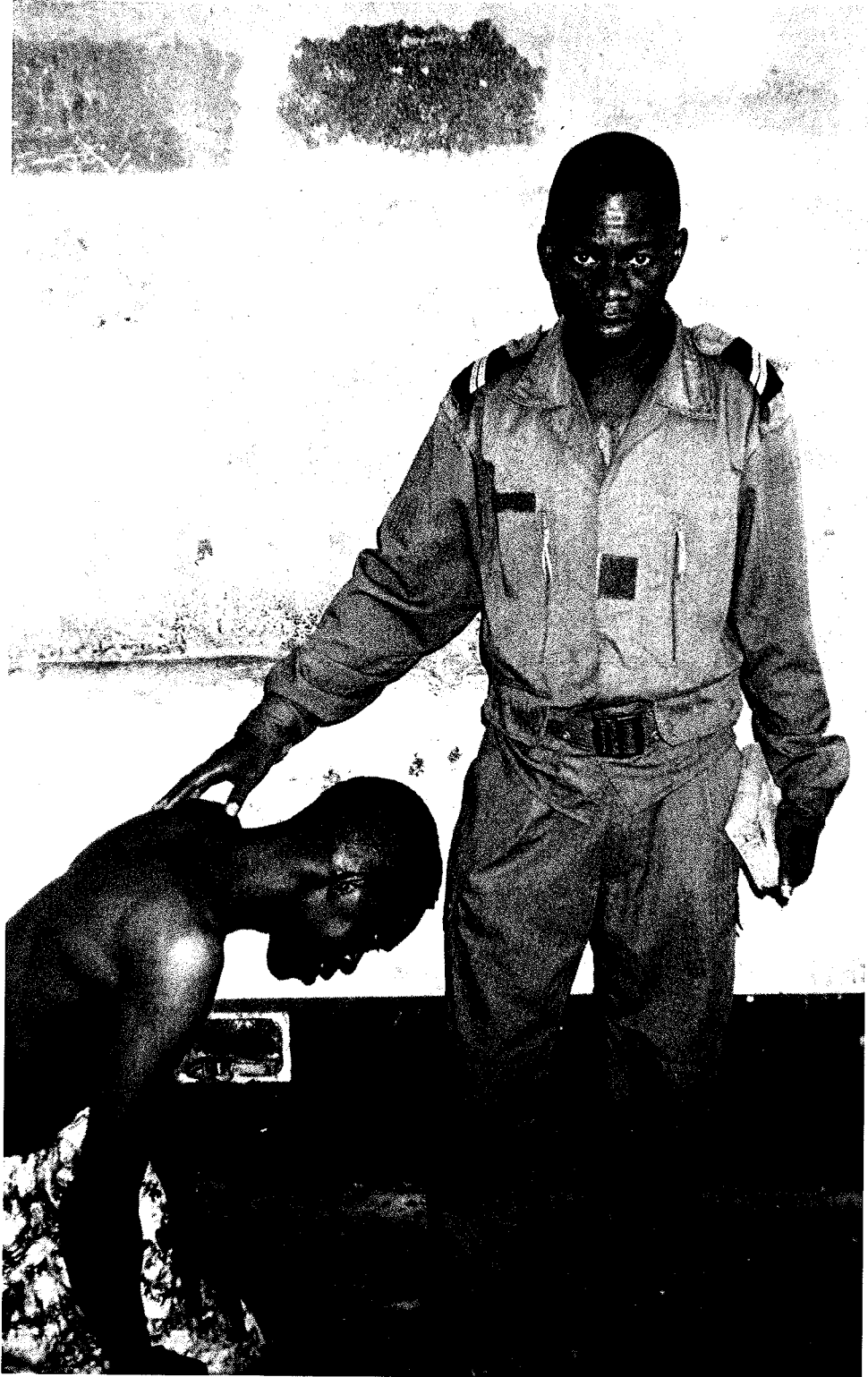
EXTORTION IN THE CONGO

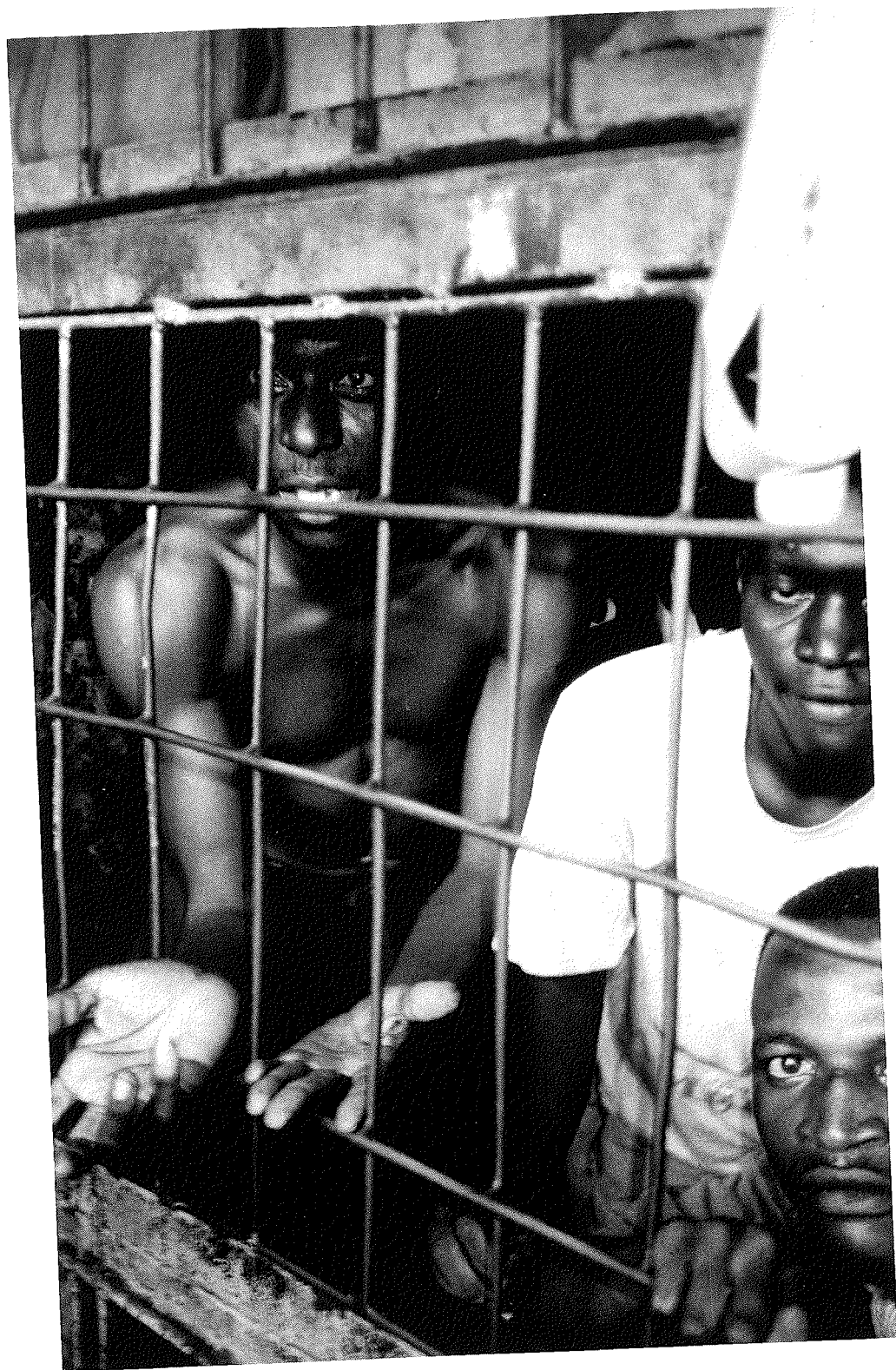
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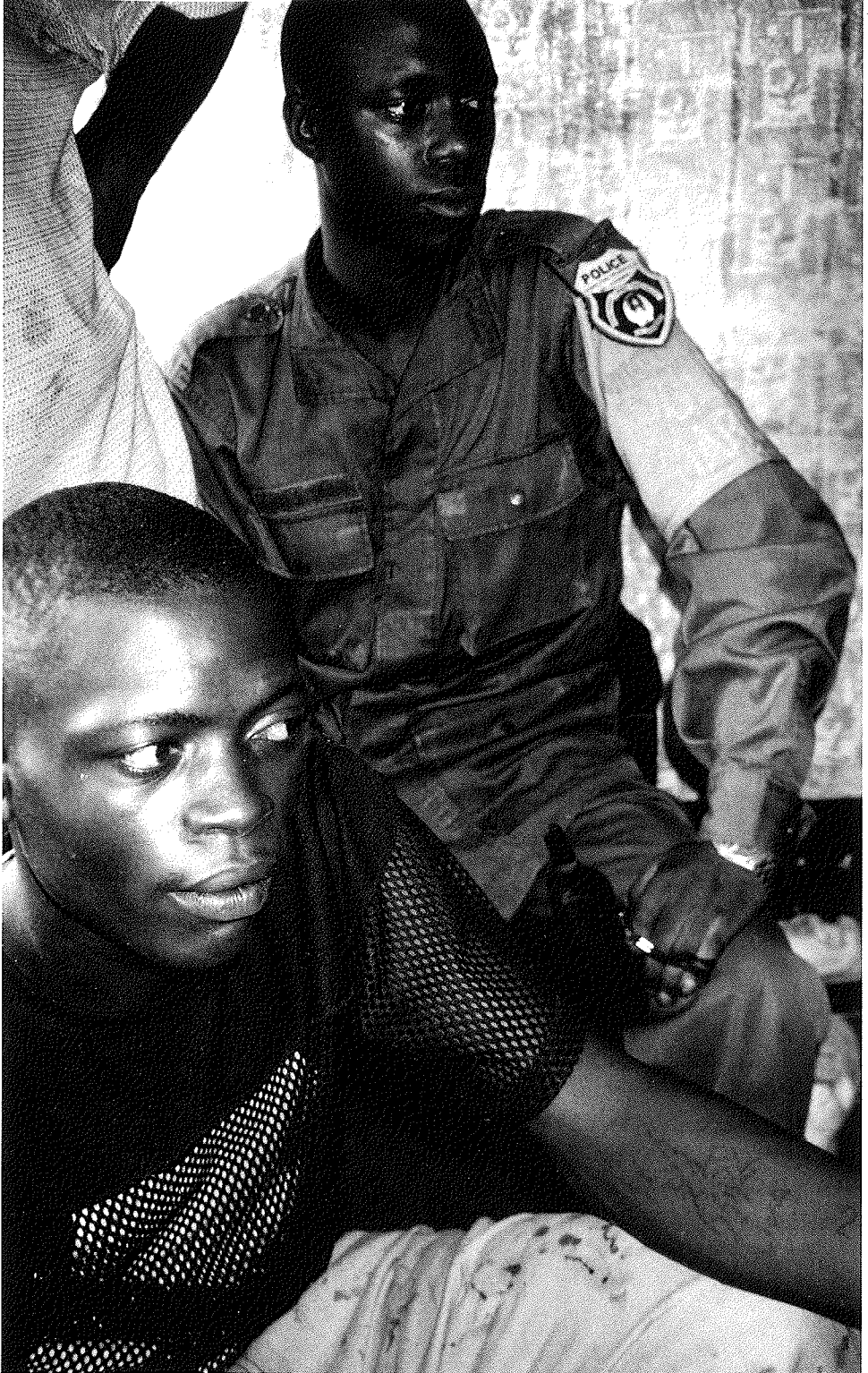
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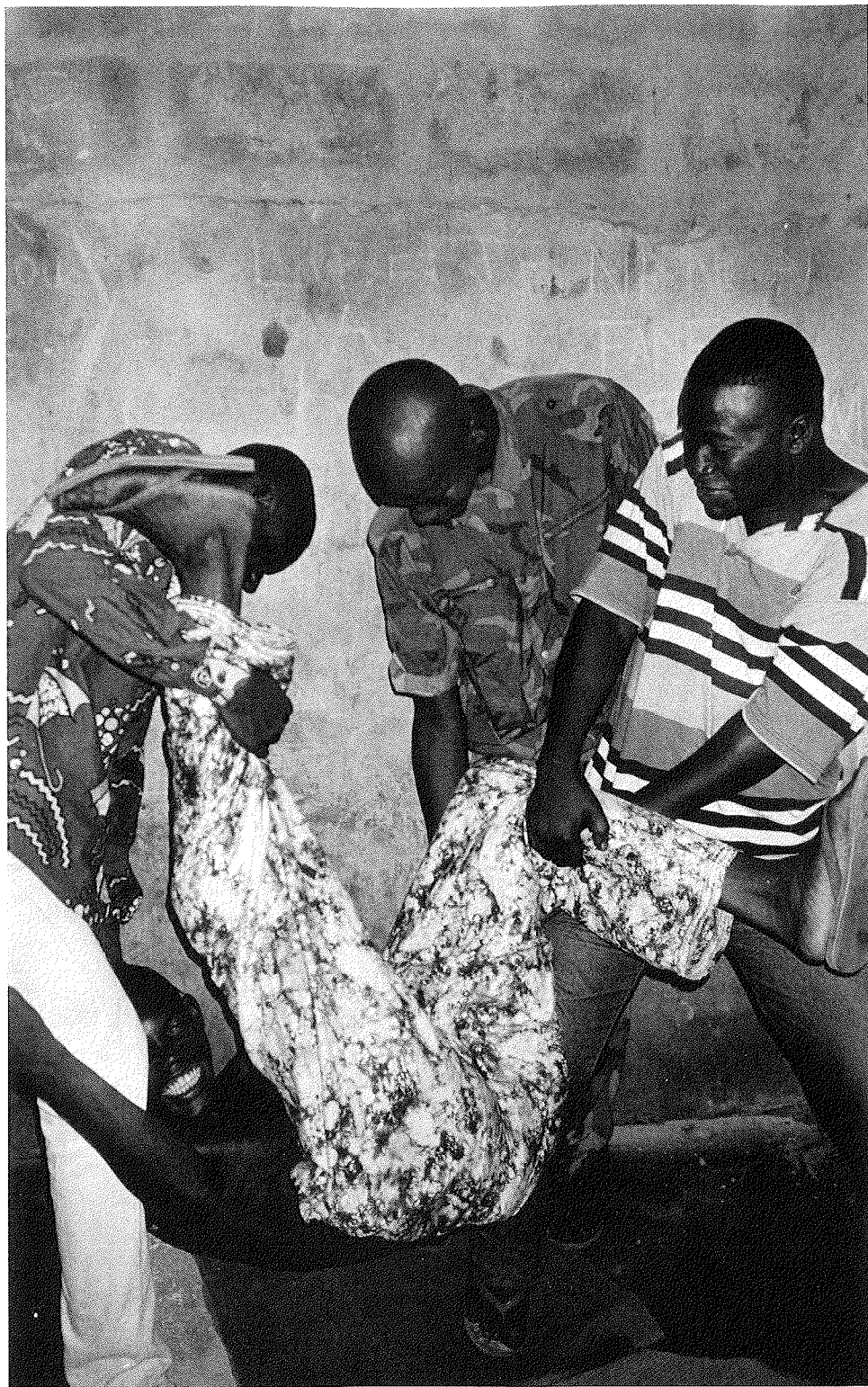
*"Special taxes" come in all flavors. And I paid them,
believe me; for every picture I paid one way or another.
The Congo was not my favorite place.*

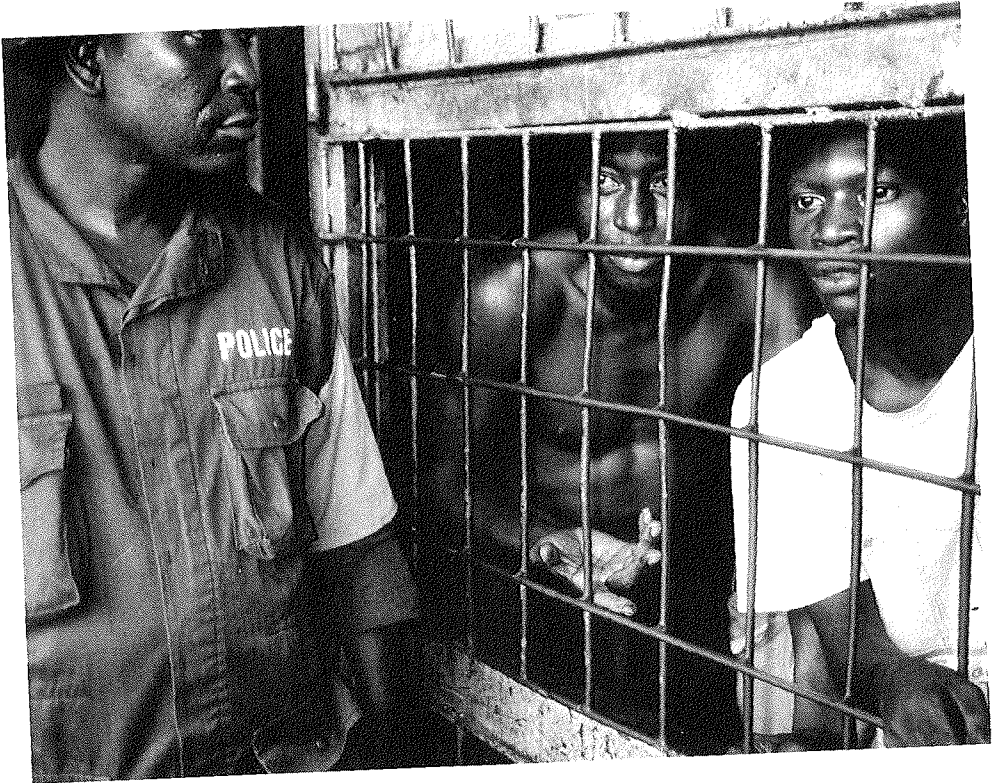
- 574. Policeman and thief in prison cell, Brazzaville, ROC.
- 575. Prison cage in Kinshasha, DROC.
- 576. Policeman and thief, Kinshasha.
- 577. Policemen playing with prisoner, Brazzaville.
- 578a. Policemen in Brazzaville. After I had taken this photo and paid for it they began worrying that they might not look nice. One man assured the others that he would cast a voodoo spell on my camera so that the film would be spoiled.
- 578b. Another view of the cage on p. 575.
- 579. Special policeman in Kinshasha.
- 580. Policewoman in Brazzaville.
- 581-83. Congolese insurgent (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie faction*), Goma, DROC. These supposed liberators extorted just as much from the people as the government did.
- 584. Pigmy soldier in Kisangani, DROC. She belonged to a rival insurgent faction also called the RCD. More special taxes were demanded of me for taking this picture.

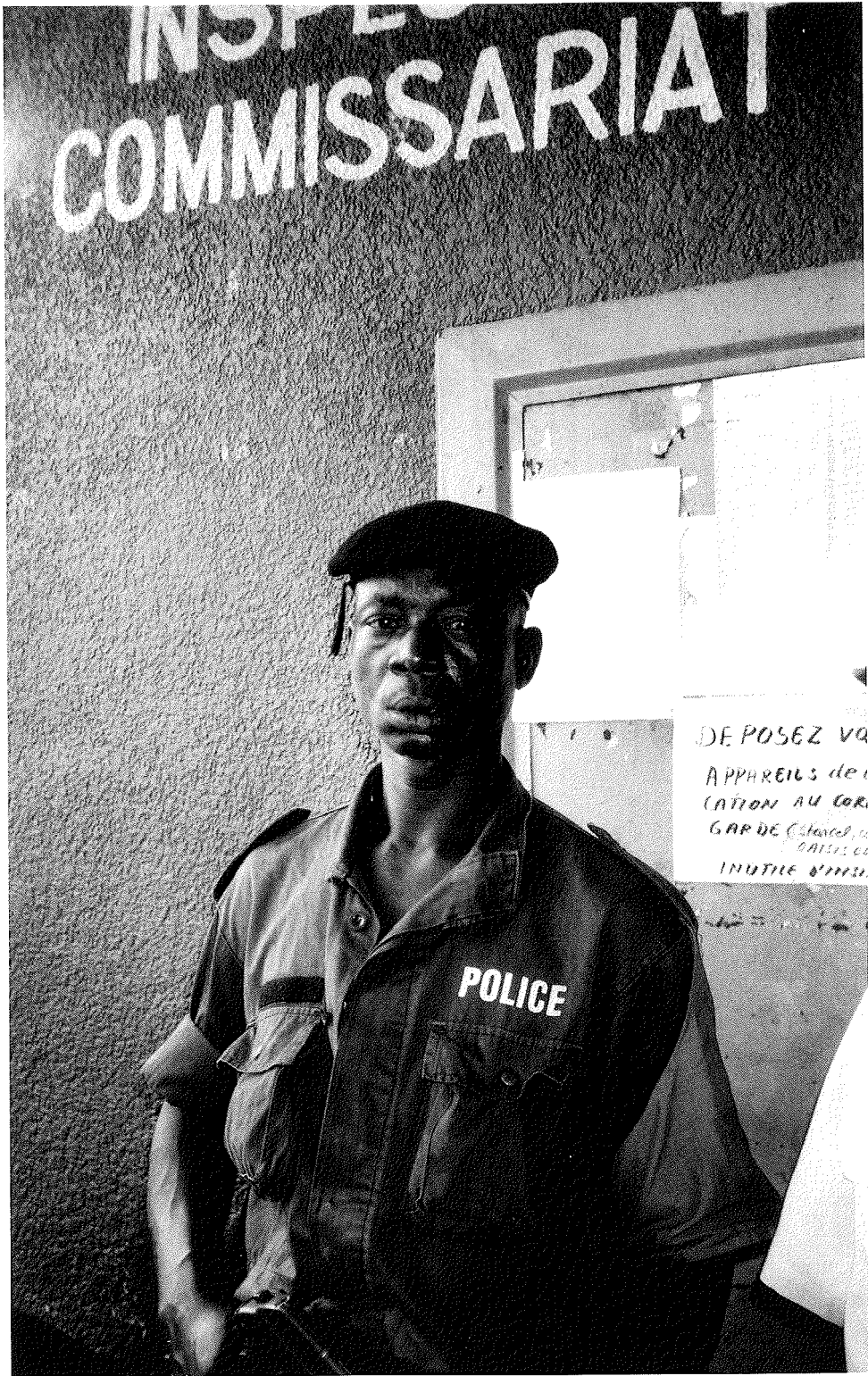


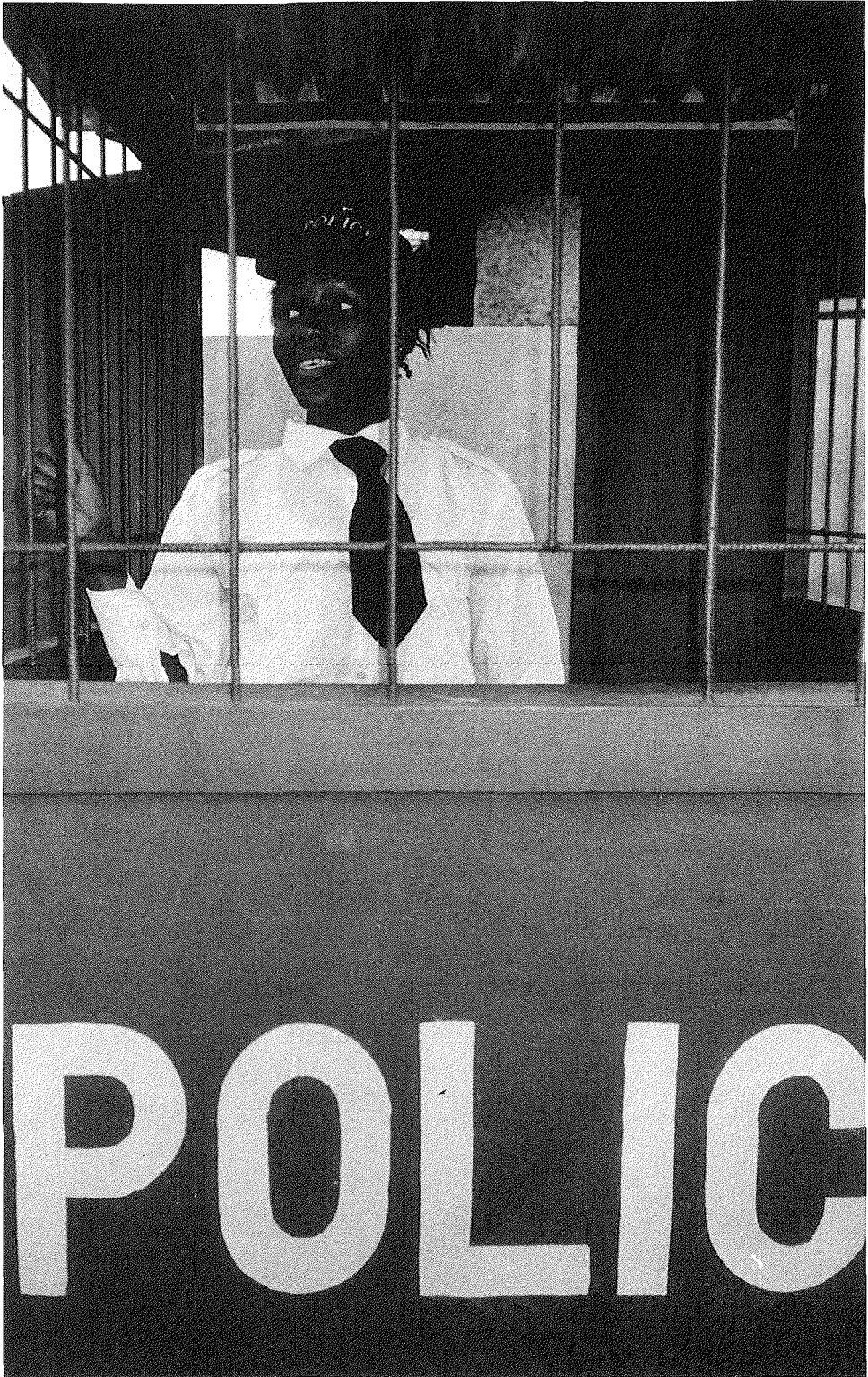


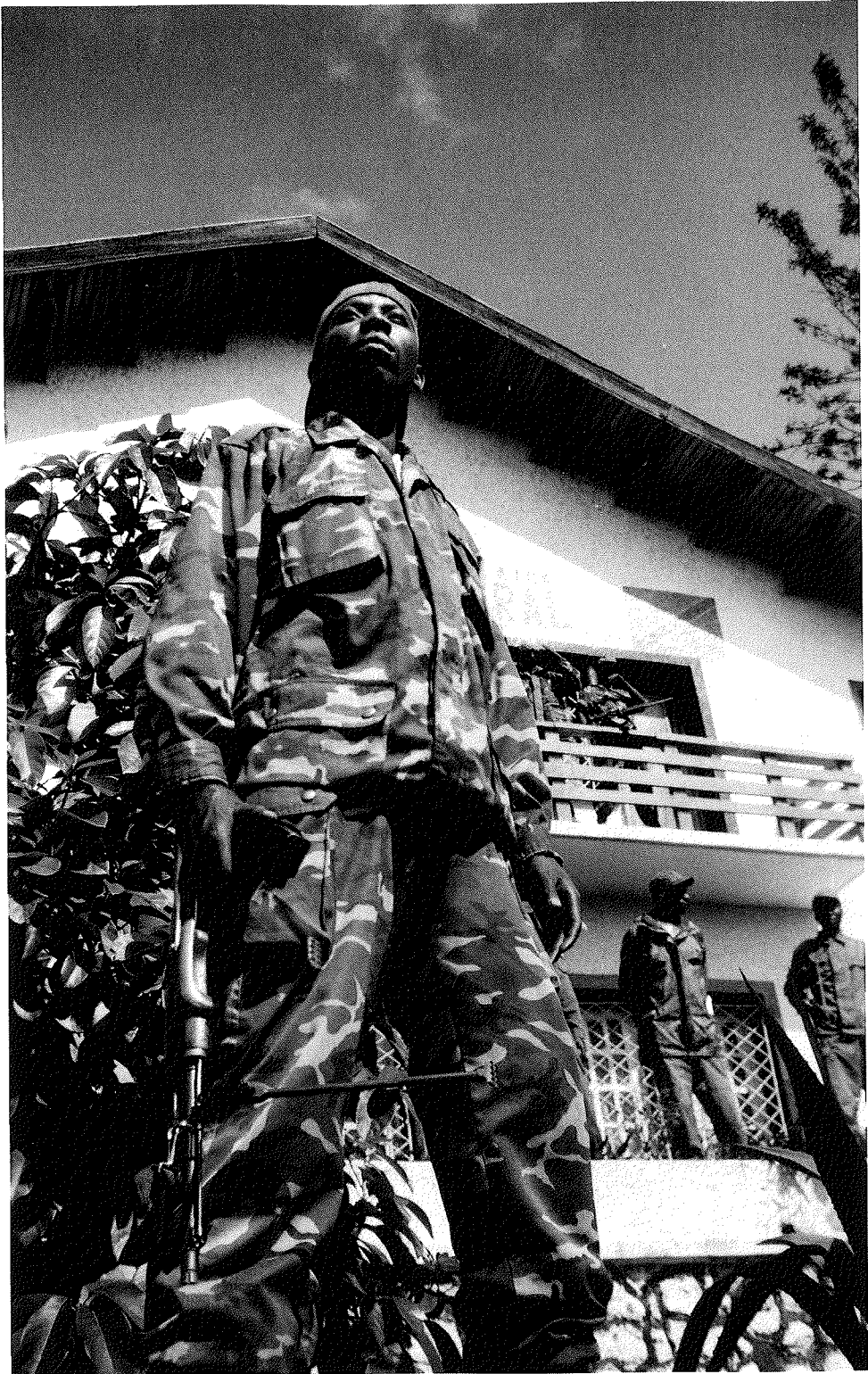


















NOTES



INTRODUCTION: SOUTHEAST ASIA

- ¹ See above, "Defense of War Aims" (The Chosen People's Calculus of Conquest: God's Instructions; ca. 1300 B.C.).
- ² Moral calculus, 2.5.
- ³ Li, p. 125 (Mao to Nehru, 1954; Mao in Moscow speech, 1957).
- ⁴ Moral calculus, 5.2.C.2.
- ⁵ Moral calculus, 2.1.
- ⁶ Defined in the moral calculus, 5.2.C.1.
- ⁷ Moral calculus, 5.2.D.1.
- ⁸ Moral calculus, 5.2.D.5.
- ⁹ Of 12 February 1947. On this subject the reader is referred to Annex C, "A Brief Chronology of Burma's Insurgencies 1954-1996."
- ¹⁰ Moral calculus, 5.2.G.1.
- ¹¹ See above, "Defense of Authority."
- ¹² See below, European case studies.
- ¹³ Within each geographical section, the case studies are actually organized in simple chronological order.
- ¹⁴ Moral calculus, 5.2.K.2.
- ¹⁵ Moral calculus, 5.2.K.4.

THE SKULLS ON THE SHELVES

- ¹ Gilbert, p. 48.
- ² He reminded me of a statement by A. Gruen (p. 43) that "those people whose destructiveness is our concern here are human beings who at the end of their misdirected development are capable of obedience but not conviction." This certainly applies to Field Marshal Keitel, at least in his memoirs; he goes along with Hitler more unquestioningly than believably.
- ³ Edward Peters, p. 270 (excerpt from 42-pp. interrogator's manual found at Tuol Sleng).
- ⁴ The Khmer Rouge were more thorough here than Rudolf Hess, Commandant of Auschwitz, who in an affidavit estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of the prisoners there had been wiped out (Remak, p. 158). The kill ratio for Tuol Sleng would work out to about 99.6 percent.

⁵ "We read in *Izvestiya* for May 24, 1959, that Yuliya Rummyantseva was confined in the internal prison of a Nazi camp while they tried to find out from her the whereabouts of her husband, who had escaped from that same camp. She knew, but she refused to tell! For the reader who is not in the know this is a model of heroism. For a reader with a bitter Gulag past it's a model of inefficient interrogation..."—Solzhenitsyn, p. 133.

⁶ Chandler et al, p. 91 ("The Party's Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields, 1977-1980," Party Center, July-August 1976).

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 91 (Four-Year Plan).

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 104 (Four-Year Plan).

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 47 (Four-Year Plan).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 19 ("Excerpted Report on the Leading Views of the Comrade Representing the Party Organization at a Zone Assembly," June 1976, ch. 2).

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 111 (Four-Year Plan).

¹² Bakunin wrote: "But isn't administrative work also productive work? No doubt it is, for lacking a good and intelligent administration, manual labor will not produce anything or it will produce very little and very badly. But from the point of view of justice and the needs of production itself, it is not at all necessary that this work should be monopolized in my hands, nor, above all, that I should be compensated at a rate so much higher than manual labor" (op. cit., p. 186).

¹³ The danger appears even between the lines of More's *Utopia*, which predated Marx by centuries and which Marx certainly read. More says (p. 52): "It is the chief and almost the only task of the syphogrants to see that no one is idle, but that everyone diligently sets about his craft, but not like a beast, worn out by constant toil from early morning until late at night. For even a slave is not as hard pressed as that... They are allowed to do as they please with the hours in between their work and sleep and meals. The purpose is not to allow them to waste this free time in wild living or idleness, but to enable them to apply their minds to whatever pursuit they wish... Most men devote their intervening hours to literature. For it is customary to hold public lectures every day before dawn." The

problem, of course, lurks within the syphogrants, who despite More's ironclad laws must retain their humanity, hence their cruelty. They are involved in the central planning industry. They decide which province needs what commodity, and how much to produce. Laws are but sandy dykes, which must always be eaten away in time by the seas of lust and ambition. It is not hard to imagine the syphogrants' deciding to extend the labor time during some state of emergency, and the public lectures becoming self-criticism sessions....

¹⁴ According to Molotov, he was actually more severe than Stalin. "He ordered the suppression of the Tambov uprising, that everything be burned to the ground... I recall how he reproached Stalin for his softness and liberalism... 'We have a milk-and-honey-power, not a dictatorship!' —Chuev, p. 107. Solzhenitsyn, as we've seen, considered them both of a piece. The most common Western view, however, is that Lenin was milder than his successor, that "Stalin's style of leadership, especially his cult of personality and his violation of Leninist norms of internal party life (by imprisonment, torture, and execution of thousands of party functionaries) was correctly pronounced after his death to be incompatible with Leninism."—Barghoom, p. 30. In numbers liquidated, Stalin certainly surpassed his mentor, although of course he ruled longer. To me the thread of continuity between the two men says more than their differences; that thread may even be followed backward, as Barghoom does; he calls Lenin an heir to pre-Revolutionary Russian absolutist traditions.

¹⁵ Both recommended reading to Khmer Rouge recruits, at least in 1972. Cf. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* p. 219. But, as you'll see, I never once met a Khmer Rouge soldier who read anything, or knew very much about Maoism or Marxist-Leninism.

¹⁶ Trotsky, *My Life*, p. 334.

¹⁷ Chandler et al, p. 30 ("Excerpted Report," ch. 3).

¹⁸ So named to one-up Mao's Great Leap Forward. As Mao's private doctor describes

that campaign, it was a bit of wishful thinking pushed through with enough rigidity to become very cruel. Pol Pot's Super Great Leap Forward was the same.

¹⁹ Maurice Meisner, "Utopian Socialist Themes in Maoism," in Lewis, p. 247. Pol Pot's life and career in some ways paralleled Mao's. Exposed to Marxist-Leninism in an urban setting (in Pol Pot's case, Paris), each began revolutionary work in a city environment before being forced by counterrevolutionary pressure to flee to the countryside, where each became "peasantized" and operated among peasants until the victory of the revolution. Pol Pot had little use for urban dwellers such as the Phnom Penhois, who had been repeatedly exhorted to come out to join his revolution and who had refused.

²⁰ Chandler et al, p. 108 (Four-Year Plan).

²¹ Thion, p. 72. In fairness to him, it must be pointed out that this essay in his book was written when the Khmer Rouge regime excluded almost all foreign observers. In his introduction, written after in 1992, he revises himself a little: "I still remember the shock of learning from the radio of the evacuation of Phnom Penh after it had fallen to the Khmer Rouge...emptying all of Cambodia's cities struck me as monstrous, maniacal, and self-defeating" (pp. xvi-xvii).

²² Sihanouk, p. 99.

²³ Mao's private doctor quotes him as saying to Nehru: "The atom bomb is nothing to be afraid of. China has many people. They cannot be bombed out of existence. If someone else can drop an atomic bomb, I can too. The deaths of ten or twenty million people is nothing to be afraid of." (See above, vol. 4, p. 54, Heimar Kahn's moral calculus of nuclear deterrence.) The doctor adds that years later, during the Great Leap Forward, "Mao knew that people were dying by the millions. He did not care" (Li, p. 125). But later the doctor says that Mao deluded himself, or at least was a willing accomplice to the blind and fearful flattery of others. Pol Pot, who was Mao's disciple, seems also to have felt this way.

²⁴ Phone conversation with David Chandler, 1996.

²⁵ In these case studies, occasional reference is

made to the weapons most relevant to the country or group under discussion—in particular, to the Kalashnikov (“Ah Ka”), the M-16, and their derivatives. The reader desiring more specific information on the history and characteristics of these is referred to Ezell’s *Small Arms of the World*, especially chapters 1 and 2. For data on which guns are used by whom, I have (as will be seen in various citations) generally cross-checked information given to me on the spot with Ezell’s *Small Arms Today*. Obviously this information ought to be of interest not only to aesthetes of weapons but also to anyone who wishes to trace an insurgent group back to its most likely weapons donor—which is to say, its sponsor, accessory, or fellow traveler. When we encounter Kalashnikovs in southeast Asia, for instance, we can usually assume a Communist (Russian or Chinese) source. I occasionally refer to the capacity of a weapon as “x + 1” rounds, meaning that x rounds can be loaded into the magazine, and one in the chamber. Thus, my .45 caliber Para-Ordnance model P-12 is so named because its capacity is eleven plus one. This term has found frequent application, especially in writing about pistols, because carrying a chambered round in a weapon is elective and not always advisable for safety reasons.

²⁶ As Marx wrote with what now seems ironic appropriateness, “There is no general obstacle absolutely preventing one man from lifting from himself the burden of the labor necessary to maintain his own existence, and imposing it on another, just as there is no unconquerable natural obstacle to the consumption of the flesh of one man by another”—*Capital*, p. 647.

²⁷ Chandler, who interviewed LS in 1989, similarly reports him as saying, “The contemptible Pot was a lovely child.”—*Brother Number One*: p. 9.

²⁸ According to Chandler (*Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 38), Pol Pot’s name had been “known to the world” since 1976 (p. 38). Given the chaotic conditions in Cambodia at that time, it is entirely possible that Loth Suong did not become aware of the name for another two years. It is equally pos-

sible that his memory or my translator’s German might have been mistaken.

²⁹ Because they were internationalists, and only sometimes against intellectuals as such; because, implacable though they were, they succeeded in being more than murderous muddlers.

³⁰ Elsewhere in his book Bullock elaborates on this to call both Hitler and Stalin paranoid. In this connection it is interesting to note that Mao’s doctor, citing Mao’s refusal to use a certain swimming pool for fear that it might be poisoned, commented: “Only in retrospect, as the condition worsened, did I see in his suspicion the seeds of a deeper paranoia” (Li, p. 234).

³¹ Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin*, pp. 11-12.

³² Chandler disagrees, saying (*Brother Number One*, p. 7): “The name he chose, although common enough among rural Cambodians (the Khmer), had no independent meaning.”

³³ Ith Sarin, in Chandler, op. cit., p. 220.

³⁴ Chandler says: “In an attempt to destroy the personalism that, in their view, had corrupted previous regimes, the CPK stressed the collective nature of its leadership and kept most of its leaders hidden. Nonetheless, its style of operation, with its lack of accountability, its self-deification, its monopoly on information, and its single voice uttering unchallengeable commands, amounted to one-man rule, and by 1977 Brother Number One (Pol Pot) and Brother Number Two (Nuon Chea) had become synonymous with the Organization” (*Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 238). However, regarding the busts, Chandler remarks: “It is likely that officials in S-21 had the prisoners make them without being asked to do so. When the regime collapsed, Pol Pot resumed his anonymity. We can imagine his feelings of relief” (*Brother Number One*, p. 158). This does not explain the survival of the bust-makers, unless (which doesn’t seem likely, for not everybody can sculpt) bust-making was a sign of status, a mark of survival rather than a cause of it; or unless the administrators at the prison had more control over the prisoners’ fate than Pol Pot did.

³⁵ Chandler et al, p. 113 (Four-Year Plan).

³⁶ This particular operation was successful. Half an hour later, I saw them taking the girl off the gurney, a bloodstained shroud around her, a gauze on her throat. They tapped her gently...

³⁷ Davies and Dunlop, p. 5.

³⁸ "One of the essential features in any modern system of defense, and particularly web defense, is the use of an immense number of land mines."—Wintringham and Blashford-Snell, p. 178.

³⁹ Shawcross, *Cambodia's New Deal*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ From Rae McGrath and Eric Stover, *Landmines in Cambodia: The Cowards' War*, quoted in Davies and Dunlop, p. 18.

⁴¹ There were about two thousand people in the commune. Since January, according to the Provincial Governor, the Khmer Rouge had killed twenty-seven, including children, and wounded eleven. They had burned twelve houses and killed more than a hundred cows. That was not so bad. In the previous year they had driven out 221 families. One reader, J. Dickinson, has asked me: "Why is anybody still there? Government pressure? Family property?" The answer is that in the 1990s Cambodia remained primarily a rural country. People lived from their rice fields or, if they were too poor for that, from cutting grass for others. If they left their own land they had no relatives to help them, nowhere to go.

⁴² I have not been able to identify these weapons more specifically. I wish I had thought to ask the commune leader when I had the chance. At that time I did not understand how much a specific weapon often says about the source country. In *Small Arms Today*, under "automatic cannon," only the KPV HMG 14.5 x 114 mm is listed, with the remarks "East Bloc origin" and "ZPU-1, ZPU-2 and ZPU-4 mounts." The KPV (*Krupnokalibernyi Pulemet Vladimironva*) is one of the two automatic cannon listed for the USSR (the other is a different caliber). ZPU (*Zenitnaya Pulemetnaya Ustanovka*) means anti-aircraft machine gun installation. Significantly, no automatic cannon whatsoever are listed for the People's Republic of China. However, the KPV HMG is one of the two automatic cannons listed for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (the other

being ZU-23, which is the second automatic cannon listed for the USSR). The same two types of ordnance are listed for the Kingdom of Thailand. It would have been interesting to see the condition of these automatic cannons. If they were old, they might well have come from Vietnam, back in the days when the Khmer Rouge and the NVA were allies. If new, their origin would be more likely to be corrupt Thai military officials. Dickinson notes, "I doubt if these were .75 caliber = 0.75 O.D. bullets—probably rather "75s" such as the French used everywhere. Perhaps this means 75 mm? Ditto rockets. You can't get much rocket in 0.87 inches."

⁴³ Supreme National Council, the sovereign body of Cambodia established by the UN between the Paris Peace Accords of 1991 and the elections of 1993.

⁴⁴ Lt.-Col. Gritz is himself the subject of a profile in this book, "Off the Grid," below.

⁴⁵ John Pilger, "Reseeding the Killing Fields: Aiding Pol Pot in Cambodia," *The Nation*, October 2, 1995, p. 342.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 344.

⁴⁷ "Letter from Editor," signed Kim Vorleak, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, inside front cover.

⁴⁸ See the chapter "But What Are We to Do?" for a portrait of Khun Sa, and "The Old Man" for more on Hadji Amin.

⁴⁹ See above.

⁵⁰ Chuev, p. 254 ("Repression," 1972).

⁵¹ Chandler, *Brother Number One*, p. 3.

⁵² Rizal, p. 100.

⁵³ "FC", p. 17, para. 48 ("Sources of Social Problems").

⁵⁴ In 1996, 1400 baht was about U.S.\$57.

⁵⁵ \$37.

⁵⁶ *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1995, p. 7 ("Khmer intrusions to be retaliated").

⁵⁷ Blum, p. 139. Blum, a former State Department officer, cites *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, a periodical whose claims I have not been able to verify. Blum adds (*loc. cit.*): "This was in keeping with the Reagan administration's subsequent opposition to the Vietnamese-supported Phnom Penh government. A lingering bitter hatred of Vietnam by unreconstructed American Cold Warriors

appears to be the only explanation for this policy."

⁵⁸ Pilger *Nation* article, p. 342.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Kambawza Win, "Burma in Thai Foreign Policy" in *Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁰ AK-47.

⁶¹ Cambodia. Koh Kong itself is a province but there are several islands there.

⁶² Slightly over \$40.

⁶³ Foreigner.

⁶⁴ Most of these did not become informants. In Asia my introductions to insurgents have very often occurred through teachers, and according to a scholar on the Malaysian Communist underground, the two groups "most susceptible to the influence of radical, utopian political ideals" are factory workers and academics, either students or teachers (x, in Lewis, p. 128). Almost all of my Thai entrées to the Khmer Rouge were through teachers, and of course Pol Pot himself was a teacher.

⁶⁵ *Bangkok Post*, Friday, February 5, 1996, p. 2, "Three killed in KR attack."

⁶⁶ U.S. \$1633.

⁶⁷ A pretty doctor at Khlong Yai's hospital said that each year she saw fewer mine injury cases; last year there'd been only about ninety-five, of which sixty or seventy were in Cambodian patients. She hadn't heard about Mr. Yu Kon, and didn't seem very surprised when I told her. Since he was already dead, they hadn't bothered to bring him to the hospital. Major mine trauma cases apparently were taken to Trat City; how many of those occurred she didn't know.

⁶⁸ T. Mohan, "Log Exports allowed of previously felled trees to neighbors," in *Cambodia Today*, issue no. 00120, February 02, 1996, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Not to be confused with the capital of Ratanakiri Province in the northeast of Cambodia.

⁷⁰ U.S. \$1225.

⁷¹ Thus we see how etiquette varies in the world. In Serbia the correct answer would have been: "Of course I'm afraid! You guys are so big and scary I want to shit my pants!"

⁷² He thought that the Reds were much stronger—in Ban Lung, at least. He knew for a

fact that the Whites avoided them. If the Reds moved onto one of their customary transport routes, the Whites simply found another way so that they wouldn't disturb them.

⁷³ U.S. \$1347.

⁷⁴ Or, as the Cambodian Minister of Agriculture put it, "In Koh Kong Province (the worst affected by illegal logging) the army has dispatched 150 heavily armed soldiers to tackle the problem of illegal logging ...the unit has managed to eradicate at least 80 percent of the illegal logging and saw-milling activities ." (T. Mohan article).

⁷⁵ Recalling the dictum laid down by John Keegan that "primary control of a frontier between civilization and barbarity is best exercised by bribing those who live on the wrong side of it," (*A History of Warfare*, p. 144), I wondered who the barbarians were.

⁷⁶ Another story I heard about Pa Te Wee was that her husband was a songwriter who had written a song against Sihanouk, so he was arrested, and died in jail under suspicious circumstances.

⁷⁷ He was full of information that morning. In his military days he'd met many K.R. Unsolicited, he reported that most of the Khmer Rouge women were ugly—mixed-Chinese, he explained contemptuously—but one in a thousand were stunningly beautiful. They wore uniforms only for training. The uniforms made them look very smart, he said. When they were actually doing a job they dressed like Cambodian peasant women, in loose clothes which wouldn't show the bulge of a gun or a bomb.

⁷⁸ "The reality of the matter," writes Shawcross (p. 47), "is that the Khmer Rouge will have little incentive to compromise so long as the Thais offer them, as they still do, an alternative to peace."

⁷⁹ So the driver blamed Thai soldiers for the deaths. But how did he know? They just disappeared. It could have been land mines, or White soldiers, or, of course, Reds.

⁸⁰ And I do admit that much of what D. castigated as my falang thinking was indeed stupid—ignorant, at least. For instance, when people bowed and clasped their hands to me to show respect, I thought it would be cour-

teous to do the same to them. I thought I was being democratic. I did not realize that, all things being equal, you must never *wai* a younger person, since that means you wish him older than you, wish him a shorter life.

⁸¹ U.S. \$4.08.

⁸² In a memoir entitled "Communism and Guigoz-Canism," Tuong Nang Tien writes: "As for a Vietnamese mother's love under Communism, there wasn't enough of it to fill a Guigoz can, even if it was to be stuffed with substitutes like corn and yam" (p. 170).

⁸³ I recollect a Cambodian refugee girl who cut my hair in Long Beach, California, later that spring. She was typical of the luckier ones. Pol Pot had not killed any of her immediate family. She'd spent a couple of years in a Thai refugee camp near Bangkok. It wasn't so bad there, she said, but "every few days" someone would sneak out to sell something and get caught and killed by corrupt Thai soldiers.

⁸⁴ *Bangkok Post*, Friday, January 19, 1996, p. 2 ("Fresh Khmer Rouge clashes expected"). The fighting did in fact resume the next day. One Thai officer is quoted in the article as saying of the Whites: "We won't allow them to use our soil to launch their assault on the Khmer Rouge. We have nothing to do with the fighting. What we're doing is protecting our sovereignty."

⁸⁵ Sihanouk writes in his reminiscences that Mao "fully supported me and the Khmer resistance against the Lon Nol government. Later he was to wholeheartedly support the Pol Pot regime. Blind to its excesses, he saw it only as the classical proletarian revolution he had dreamed of personally spearheading all his life. Goal-oriented, he was oblivious to the Khmer Rouge's cruel extremism and coldly indifferent to the human casualties it perpetrated" (p. 111).

⁸⁶ He was, it would seem, more a vulgar Maoist than a vulgar Marxist. Marx believed that development creates a proletariat, which becomes the revolutionary class. Mao's cadres were, like China, mainly made up of peasants.

⁸⁷ This was the story of the proprietor himself. The story which I heard about this from one of our drivers in Borai was that two or three months previously, a pair of young K.R.

boys—he was sure that they were K.R.—had offered him a thousand baht to drive them to Khlong Yai. Since the usual fare was only seven hundred, he thought that it was fishy and politely begged off in the most gracious Thai style, saying that he already had a customer. The two K.R.s hired a different driver, murdered him halfway to Khlong Yai, came back, and robbed that gold shop. I had wondered why it was that only the gold shops in Borai had bars; the ones in Khlong Yai didn't. The Khmer Rouge seemed to partake more of banditry in Borai, unlike in Khlong Yai where everyone kept insisting that they "spoke true."

⁸⁸ U.S. \$42.

⁸⁹ Acting on this tip, D. went to Chantaburi and found a new Thai regulation: Only Chantaburi residents could cross the border to Cambodia there, and then only with a "special soldier paper for trading." One man said he sold motorcycles in Cambodia, but was really a black-market gem dealer. The K.R. discouraged this kind of individual enterprise, sometimes by murdering the would-be entrepreneurs if it could catch them.

⁹⁰ U.S. \$33. The White Khmer in Borai had said that the K.R. "salary" was six hundred (U.S. \$24), but surely such amounts vary widely, as is the rule in dispersed guerrilla groups such as the Khmer Rouge, the PULO, or even the MTA.

⁹¹ In South Carolina I saw a hotel billboard which said: "It's Better to Be Right Than Popular," but in southeast Asia that slogan might be put: "Popular Is Right."

⁹² Voeuk Vittanhou, "Two MPs killed while robbing," in *Cambodia Today*, issue no. 00120, February 02, 1996, p. 6.

⁹³ "The Thais help the Khmer Rouge for food," another informant in Borai had assured me. "About guns I don't know, but for food I myself always see the big soldiers coming to buy."

⁹⁴ We met him because D. was day after day sicker and sicker with fever and a sore throat, and one day when her body felt to my touch as hot as a fresh-baked cookie straight from the oven I became alarmed and decided to play doctor. Donning my headlamp and seizing a pen to be my tongue depressor, I asked

her to open her mouth. I was looking for evidence of a bacterial infection. But D., exhausted and a little delirious, could not understand my actions. To her I was as a fearsome sea-monster with that shining light in the middle of my forehead. Terrified, she refused all my entreaties, until my worry was at last transformed to exasperation, and I rushed out, determined to bring a doctor to her whether she liked it or not. As I was searching for a *tuk-tuk*, an old Thai hailed me in a sincere attempt at English and invited me to have a beer with him. This was, of course, the old souse. And once I'd gotten D. to the hospital and they shone their own light down her throat and prescribed antibiotics, I was able to relax and get to know the old guzzler.

⁹⁵ U.S. \$82.

⁹⁶ According to Shawcross, Cambodia experienced economic growth of seven to eight percent in 1991-93, the most recent years for which he had data. The growth was "centered in Phnom Penh, reaching only fifteen percent of the people," and thereby widening the urban-rural gap as well as the gap between the rich and the poor (p. 77).

⁹⁷ Several Borai-based gem dealers from Battambang told me on separate occasions that gems were almost half the price in Battambang that they were in Borai.

⁹⁸ Op. cit., p. 100.

⁹⁹ Tuesday, February 6, 1996, p. 2; by Chea Sotheacheath.

¹⁰⁰ In my experience, friendliness is in inverse proportion to wealth. Thus the fact that five years ago I would have been surrounded wherever I went, and greeted with stares and worshipful smiles, and two years ago I would have been greeted with: Excuse me, sir, what is your nationality? and this year I encountered merely the occasional polite nod, I took to be a positive omen.

¹⁰¹ In 1995, 21% of Cambodia's \$410 million, or \$85 million, went to defense. —*Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1995, p. 5 (sidebar: "Re-building Cambodia").

¹⁰² U.S. \$204.

¹⁰³ Customs revenue accounted for sixty percent of national internal revenue in Cambodia, so there were obviously lots of

trade and opportunities for corruption, such as smuggling wood, or fish, or anything else. *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1995, p. 5 (sidebar: "Re-building Cambodia").

¹⁰⁴ Tuesday, February 6, 1996, p. 2. The weapon was an AK-47.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. 80¢ to about \$2.

¹⁰⁶ Meisner, in Lewis, p. 248.

¹⁰⁷ U.S. \$33.

¹⁰⁸ *Sihanouk Reminisces*, p. 46. Napoleon would have agreed with reservations; he liked the common touch; Sun-tzu would have agreed wholeheartedly: "It is essential for the general to be tranquil and obscure, . . . able to stupefy the eyes and ears of the officers and troops, keeping them ignorant" (op. cit., p. 222). Pol Pot seems to have followed this advice.

¹⁰⁹ KGB, pp. 83-84 ("Conducting Internal Intelligence").

¹¹⁰ Baht.

¹¹¹ I have met with matter-of-fact talk of ghosts and magic in many southeast Asian groups, including Cambodians, Karenni, Shan, Thais, Wa, Li So, Vietnamese, and Laotians. One researcher found that lower-class Cambodian refugees in the U.S. often take TV science fiction movies to be real proof of the spirit world. "These supernatural encounters are so widely distributed and consistent among Khmers because they are culturally defined as real and appropriate."—Frank Smith, "Cultural Consumption: Cambodian Peasant Refugees and Television in the 'First World,'" in Ebihara et al, p. 154.

¹¹² U.S. \$33.

¹¹³ One scholar of Asian revolutions (Jeffrey Race, "Toward an Exchange Theory of Revolution," in Lewis, pp. 186-91) has pointed out that the difference between a bureaucracy and a political party is a fixed structure and quota of reward on the part of the former, and a potential for the expansion of both on the part of the latter, because the bureaucracy has a skeleton already prefabricated and appointed from above, whereas the political party can add protoplasm in any direction as its constituency grows. Thus, for instance, a Vietnamese peasant with no hope of entering the civil service might have turned to the Viet Cong. This heuristic helps us also understand

why so many Third World officials, such as our police general, become corrupt. Even if one succeeds in becoming a member of that bureaucracy, there are still not enough rewards to go around. Having no particular reason to believe that becoming an insurgent would benefit him, someone like the police general naturally turns to commerce, whose protoplasm is even more conveniently fluid (that's why financial analysts talk about "liquidity") than that of the most exemplary and spontaneous revolutionary counter-institution. Long live Comrade Money!

¹¹⁴ In 1993, Shawcross had written that Cambodian police had not yet been trained to respect human rights, which was why even the judges, "like everyone else," were terrified of them (p. 62). And regarding Poipet itself, Shawcross quoted one U.N. border control officer there who reported that Cambodian soldiers and police smuggled and extorted bribes to such an extent as to "subvert or completely deny the exercise of the border control function" (p. 70).

¹¹⁵ Tuesday, February 6, 1996, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ U.S. \$122.

¹¹⁷ Khmer for "thank you."

¹¹⁸ This interview was translated in progress by D. I had the Khmer language parts retranslated for comparison purposes; my second translator was Miss C.K. of Long Beach, California.

¹¹⁹ U.S. \$612.

¹²⁰ The arithmetic checks out. The Lon Nol time came to an abrupt end in 1975, when the Pol Pot time began. If the general was thirty-six in 1996, then twenty-odd years before, he would have been sixteen. Since in most places where standards of literacy are poor, the numbers which my interviewees give me fail to be consistent, I consider this to be a small but significant indication of the general's accuracy.

¹²¹ Remainder of this paragraph added from C.K.'s translation.

¹²² This last clause added from C.K.'s translation.

¹²³ This sentence added from C.K.'s translation.

¹²⁴ This last sentence added from C.K.'s translation.

¹²⁵ Last two words added from C.K.'s translation.

tion.

¹²⁶ Davies and Dunlop, p. 42.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

¹²⁸ C.K.'s translation: "I know by my own eyes."

¹²⁹ *Sihanouk Reminisces*, p. 164.

¹³⁰ C.K.'s translation adds: "That place they meet all the people from another country."

¹³¹ C.K.'s translation: "I don't know, but if talk exactly is a leader."

¹³² C.K.'s translation: "Treigh, a little about forty or sixty km. from Battambang."

¹³³ C.K.'s translation: "Three million people." But General X. corrected himself; C.K. was clearly in error here.

¹³⁴ Here again it is possible to cross-check General X's testimony. Everything but the exact number of victims seems to be confirmed. Pol Pot's biographer, who has sifted through Tuol Sleng confessions and the debriefings of defectors, tells the story thus: "In May 1975, over one hundred officers of the Republican army were rounded up in Battambang and told to prepare for Sihanouk's return. They were loaded into trucks, taken into the countryside, and shot" (Chandler, *Brother Number One*, p. 110).

¹³⁵ Last six words from C.K.'s translation.

¹³⁶ "A group of Cambodian jurists," pp. II-48-52 ("Alfonso Denise's"—that is, Denise Alfonso's—testimony).

¹³⁷ This last sentence from C.K.'s translation.

¹³⁸ This last sentence from C.K.'s translation. Perhaps the meaning is less sinister or Sparta-like: "army of the country" or "national army."

¹³⁹ "Characteristically, revolutions fracture continuity," says Chandler (*Tragedy of Cambodian History*, p. 236). "At the same time, many continuities persist from prerevolutionary to revolutionary regimes. In the Cambodian case, continuities of context and behavior combined with external factors made the revolution itself by 1978 a failure for its leaders and a disaster for nearly everyone else. Partly, this was the fault of the harsh, erratic behavior of the revolutionaries themselves. After the end of 1976, failure sprang from the leadership's fixations with Vietnam and treachery within their ranks."

¹⁴⁰ This last sentence from C.K.'s translation.

¹⁴¹ This last sentence from C.K.'s translation.

¹⁴² C.K.'s translation: "Because if don't have any leader to order for fight with Vietnam we couldn't win"—not very logical, since they didn't win.

¹⁴³ "Sister-in-law," runs C.K.'s more accurate translation.

THE LAST GENERATION

¹ John Steinbeck, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, (New York: Penguin, 1995 repr. of 1941 ed., with additions), p. 248 ("Appendix: About Ed Ricketts, 1951).

² I've sometimes been asked "how long the Asian gangs have been around." This question is almost impossible to answer, because it depends on what one means by a gang. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and probably before, rival Chinese *tongs* (district organizations) were fighting for jobs and territory in the California Delta. They were not gangs in the current sense of the world, but they occasionally sent out hatchet men against each other—*literal* hatchet men. The town of Locke was founded and controlled by the Zhongshan Tong, while Walnut Grove, which lies literally within sight, was run by Sze Yap Tong. If you want to see in this situation a precursor to that of rival gang "hoods," you are welcome to do so, although such an analogy is obviously flawed. The tongs were more or less efficient political "machines"—a cross between the Chamber of Commerce and the Mafia, with a little Rotary Club thrown in. To me, at least, the "hoods" were more accurately prefigured by the mid-century New York City neighborhoods where Irish and Puerto Rican kids were beating each other up. The Zhongshan people and the Sze Yap people were both Chinese, yes, but they came from different regions and regarded each other as rivals. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, about 150,000 Cambodian refugees arrived in the United States (Ebihara et al, p. 18; (introduction). A great part of these now live in California. I have visited Cambodia several times, in peace and in war, and have never heard of any

indigenous gang system over there. But it is probable that most of the Cambodians who fled the genocide of the Khmer Rouge, got interned for years in Thai refugee camps, and finally arrived in the U.S. had seen desperate people do desperate things. What happened next? "Cambodian peasant refugees," writes one anthropologist, "have almost invariably settled in poor, primarily black urban neighborhoods in this country; they are often the victims of crime, and the refugees see blacks as the most visible perpetrators of these crimes." (ibid, p. 156; Frank Smith). And, indeed, in this chapter you will have heard many Cambodians say unpleasant things about blacks. I have also heard them denouncing Latinos. Who really knows whether it was blacks or Hispanics whom they most feared—and imitated? No doubt it varied from city to city, from neighborhood to neighborhood. They learned from whoever taught them.

³ Not her real name.

⁴ G.M. Bush, "A year of gang peace....," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, Monday, September 18, 1995.

⁵ In tabular form the history of the war (or some of it) is as follows:

YEAR	DEATH	INCIDENTS
<i>(incidents = felonies & violent misdemeanors)</i>		
1989	1	9
1990	5	30
1991	9	82
1992	9	53
1993	2	30
1994 Jan/Feb.	6	49

Source: G.M. Bush, "Gangs See No End to Battles," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, Monday, March 21, 1994, p. A1.

⁶ See the chapter on moral yellowness.

⁷ A personal example of perhaps even greater relevance: I was robbed at knifepoint by two black men in Minneapolis. And then two weeks later in San Francisco I got robbed again, this time not violently, while descending the escalator. I had just kissed someone goodbye; I was in a love-drizzled state of

mind; perhaps I was careless; no, I'm certain that I wasn't careless. I may not possess every talent, but I have always been conscious of the pressure of my wallet against my right buttock. Once in Italy the delicate sliding sensation alerted in time to easily foil a pick-pocket. But in this case there was no clue. I felt the wallet against my flesh at the top of the escalator, and at the bottom it was gone. There was no one behind me on the escalator. My robber must have leaned and snatched just as I began to be carried downward. There had been 1,000 dollars in that wallet. I did not even have bus fare to the clinic, where I was supposed to go, let alone pay for the visit. Fortunately I never use credit cards, but I did have two bank machine cards which it seemed time to cancel. I was struck by the unhelpfulness of those banks. It was fortunate that I had a pocketful of change, because each bank made me call two other numbers in succession. The voices I was thus referred to, bored and unfriendly, asked me questions that I could not answer, and I almost raged. I then went to the woman in the ticket booth by the escalator, and asked her if by any chance she had seen a lost wallet. —That's not my job, she said, returning to her newspaper. She was black. (The unfriendly voices on the telephone had not been white or black, because I could not see them.) It was then, as I descended the escalator once more on the chance that my wallet could somehow be where it wasn't, that I began to visualize the criminal, as a black man, tall and poor and menacing like the two in Minneapolis. Only a month or two later (for the loss of that money had caused me some hardship) was I able to re-imagine the pickpocket as the entity he ought to be based on my information: a silhouette, like those nasty faceless voices, neither white nor black.

⁸ Sample testimony from one Cambodian lady: "It's great for he move here. He help my daughter change from gang; he do everything from God. Gangster throw thing in the church and not respect him, but he patient. Now the parent come here for help. They not come here for clean; they come here for problem."—(Not Soeun, however, because she

was Buddhist. She thought that people like Pastor Joe were brainwashers.)—I took a photo of the lady, who grinned and said: "Don't put my face on the fish sauce label."

⁹ Her generic word for gangs.

¹⁰ Tiny Rascals Gang, at one time the most powerful of the Cambodian gangs.

¹¹ Graffiti gangsters.

¹² Neighborhood; turf.

¹³ According to one Canadian criminologist published by the UN, policy recommendations for reducing crime include: (1) reducing "effects of relative child poverty" in order to reduce violence, (2) "rediscovering interpersonal links," and (3) "involving the 15-18 year olds who face blocked life opportunities" (UNICRI, pp. 206-207 [Irvin Waller, "Policy Implications: Related to National and International Surveys"]). I agree with all of these vis-à-vis Cambodian immigrant children. If somebody were to give their parents wheelbarrows full of money, they wouldn't live in gang neighborhoods. If their family ties suddenly became as strong as in Cambodia, then they would, like Soeun, put peers second. If their life opportunities miraculously unblocked themselves, they would surely be less likely to find gang membership attractive. I expect all these things to happen shortly after the Second Coming.

¹⁴ According to Sørensen, the second largest number was in Lowell, Massachusetts, at 23,000.

KICKIN' IT

¹ In December 1999, the civilian unemployment rate in San Joaquin County was 8.4%. In California as a whole it was 3.7%. The respective figures for 1998 were 10.3% and 5.5%. (Source: SJ Council of Governments Research & Forecasting Center, quoted in pamphlet "Resource Guide: Stockton—San Joaquin, California," p. 9).

² Schell, p. 200.

³ At the request of most of my interviewees, I am not going to name any gang members, or identify any named person as a gangster. Ask a homeboy if he belongs to a certain gang,

and he might say: "I been down with them," or "I bang with them sometimes," or "We be kickin' every now and then." But even these equivocations can get him in trouble. A few might proudly announce: "You can say I'm a third generation G." A G is a gangster. But they could be teasing me just to amuse their friends. As they say in Colombia, *you never know who is who*. I think I know, in most cases. Read between the lines.

⁴ In the two decades since 1980, Stockton's Asian population increased enormously. One newspaper article, citing U.S. census figures, claimed that the Asian presence had gone up by 225%, the city now (2000) being 21% Asian. When my fact-checkers checked the actual census data for me, he found an Asian population of "13,549 in 1980 and 48,506 in 2000. This was an increase of over 350%. In 2000 Stockton was 19.9% Asian."

⁵ Reptile got his nickname from his mother because he went through a phase of wearing only green. Gremlin's street name rhymed with his Khmer name. In Kentfield, one boy's Cambodian nickname meant "stinky" because his armpits always smelled; he didn't seem a bit ashamed of that moniker.

⁶ In Long Beach, TRG had "claimed the blue rag." In Sacramento, they wore both blue and grey. "Most Asian gangs, they don't color trip," opined Detective Kang. "They don't really care if you wear blue or green or white as long as you're down for the gang." I see his point, although I wouldn't entirely agree.

⁷ In Manchester I was told that Domino's would not deliver either day or night, but this was not true.

⁸ I have not verified this.

⁹ Hispanics were referred to only rarely, and then with disparaging disinterest.

¹⁰ The Kentfield line on his experience, as expressed by the thirteen-year-old, was: "As long as they don't start nothing, they can come in here and got no problem."

¹¹ An example will show how stupid they were. I recall the big, chuckling Manchester homeboy (whom I suspect was a CBC member) who'd been accosted with a friendly-seeming "Whassup, cuz?" from a Hmong who'd then whipped out a gun and forced him to run. The

gunman hailed from an organization which Sacramento police detective Jim Kang called "at one time, a most active and ferocious gang," and in places it still is—namely, MOD, which stands for Masters of Disaster and which some Cambodians, privileging pronunciation over orthography, de-abbreviate as Hmong On Diapers. "We make fun of their girls," explained the chuckler, "'cause they piss standing up." He also looked down on the Hmong because they "packed eleven people into a two-bedroom apartment," which was equally true of Cambodians. One of the saddest aspects of inter-Asian hatred was the application of anti-Asian epithets to one's enemies. In Kentfield, for instance, some of the homeboys referred to Oak Park as "Gook Park."

¹² Disrespect.

¹³ In Long Beach the Asian Boyz wore grey.

¹⁴ "It just takes one guy to mess things up," gangsters repeatedly said, reminding me of the Serb I met during the Yugoslav civil war who explained how outsiders could instigate violence: "It's easy. In my town all you'd have to do would be to go to where some Serb lived and throw in a hand grenade, then shoot some Croats. A small group of professionally trained people could do it. Then you spread the news and arm the survivors." The gangsters I met, of course, did not possess the cold blooded foresight of warmongers. Their conflicts were random and accidental. A fight over a woman, a boy who wore the wrong colors in the wrong place—it was all blind.

¹⁵ Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, pp. 68-69 ("War").

¹⁶ So much of all this comes down to posturing. The most scary thing that happened to another OCG member in Kentfield was when he "got pointed at" with an ABZ man's gun near a shopping mall on March Lane. "I dunno the name of the guy. Too many enemies, man. But it was ABZ. Finally I just bust out, *shoot me an' shit!* They just start cussin' at me and then drive the car away." I suppose that homicides happen when the posturers get provoked to show their stuff.

¹⁷ "You know, it's a steady stream of people coming in," said Detective Kang. "As many as we lock up, more come. It's still on its way

up. Now we're into our third generation of Asian gang here in the Sacramento area. They're more apt to resist you. We had an incident a few weeks ago where they tried to run down a police officer who was trying to arrest them for breaking into a car. It was like something out of the movies..."

¹⁸ As it was described to me, a BG is a new recruit, a beginning gangster. After two or three years, he easily becomes a YG, a young gangster. Then he must actively "do dirt" to become an OG.

¹⁹ This dichotomy reminds me of the dictum I heard repeatedly in Manchester: Any white visitors must be either druggies or undercover cops.

I'M ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN YOUNG GIRLS

¹ Of course I am in favor of legalizing and regulating prostitution everywhere, provided it can be done without too greatly invading people's privacy. My friend Becky Wilson, an American stripper, wrote me in May 1996: "Some of my sex industry worker girlfriends are not PRO-LEGALIZATION; they are PRO-decriminalization. There, supposedly, is a big difference between the two since in cases of the legalization of prostitution most prostitutes just end up being pimped by the government since they are forced to work in brothels in places like the Mustang Ranch in Nevada. I appreciate your supporting the rights of sex industry workers though." This is not the first time that this sentiment has reached me. I think that it is really sad to hear that these prostitutes cannot even trust the government enough to hope for legalization. But I disagree with them. As long as we are wishing for the moon, why not wish for a situation in which prostitution can be more than merely tolerated?

² In 1993, 20,000 bhat was about \$800.

³ Big brother (same meaning as the Burmese "eko")

⁴ Caucasians

⁵ If a Burmese goes by road he needs an ID card; by plane, even entirely within the coun-

try, he needs a passport. Anytime he stays at a hotel he must give his ID number.

⁶ Not her actual prostitute name, which she still uses at the Center. "Sukanja" is a moderately common Thai prostitute name meaning simply "woman."

⁷ About US \$80.00.

BUT WHAT ARE WE TO DO?

¹ His given name apparently is Chang Chi-Fu.

² In 1994 \$1 US remained equal to 25 baht.

³ *Titbonia diversifolia*.

⁴ In this part of the world, if one is poor, one has a choice: one can sell a daughter or one can sell opium. In Mae Hong Song most of the prostitutes are Burmese. (These women rarely smoke opium, by the way, which fits my little dichotomy.) According to D, "the Meo, Tai-Yai, and Karen and like that, they don't like" being prostitutes. So that leaves them the other choice.

⁵ What happens if you eat an opium flower? I'd asked a Meo man. —Like a drug, like medicine. Very bitter. Maybe you feel like you drink beer.

⁶ He may well be pardoned on the King's birthday after 10 or 20 years.

⁷ In Mae Hong Song the price was 60 baht.

⁸ In his essay "Opium Traffic," Antonin Artaud wrote: "We are born corrupted in body and spirit; we are congenitally fucked up. By eliminating opium, one doesn't eliminate the criminal impulse, the malignancies of body and soul, the propensity to despair, the wailing cretin, the pox-ridden infant, nor the progressive crumbling of the instincts. One doesn't change the fact that there are individuals destined to be poisoned ... if you remove their tools of folly, they will create 10,000 new ones." (draft translation by Richard Grossman, 1994).

⁹ "Love of Thailand Village."

¹⁰ Newspaper accounts reported 4,000, with another 6,000 in "surrounding areas."

¹¹ I found almost nobody among the hill tribes who didn't believe this, with the exception of some Karen. There was Tung, for

instance, a Meo boy, one of five brothers, who drove us to Ban Rak Tai wearing his black pajamas which his mother had embroidered for him when he married; he was one of five sons. (He fall in love with some girl first, said D., and he ask the parents.) I asked his opinion of the Opium King. —Khun Sa he is very nice person, D. translated. He take care of everyone in his village all the time. If we have some problem he never throw us away. He have good heart. When he come to meet us, he never wear uniform of any soldier except private. —Khun Sa is a very well-educated man, and surely has read Sun-tzu's *Art of War*, which recommends just such action: "When the general regards his troops as young children, they will advance into the deepest valleys with him. When he regards the troops as his beloved children, they will be willing to die with him" (p. 215).

¹² When I asked Ta Khun Mong, introduced below, who the Wa Opium King was, he replied: There is no Wa Opium King! Khun Sa is the only one in the world!—My understanding is that there are several lesser Wa Opium Dukes.

¹³ This Orwellian slogan was formulated even better by Molotov, who cried out: 'Peace, peace, peace! Better the hand wither than write this nonsense! Peace, peace! It must be fought for and won!' and then he said: "But there can be no peace without war."—Chuev, pp. 386-7 ("The Program Impedes Progress," 1973).

¹⁴ According to D., "Ta" is the same as "Big Soldier."

¹⁵ An article in the *South China Morning Post* mentioned a United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Chinese army uniforms. This may or may not be the same organization. The reporter seems to have met a Major-General Ai Rai, the O.I.C. liaison to Thailand. I mentioned Ai Rai to Ta Khun Mong, and he smiled. —Ah, Ai Rai. My friend. But he doesn't know much like me. Everything I know more than Ai Rai, because he is *my* friend. He do about the economy for this area, he buy and sell clothes and something.

¹⁶ A former State Department employee

makes the same claim. Cf. Blum, p. 24. Bertil Lintner, however, insists that the opium trade is not "the result of nefarious activities of sinister CIA agents," but the natural result of ethnic insurgency, about which the CIA was complacent, on the grounds of anticommunism. Cf. Linter, pp. 331-33.

¹⁷ Khun Sa and many of his "big soldiers" formerly had some affiliation with the BCP, which used to be the greatest threat to the Burmese regime. Regarding Chinese influence upon the BCP, the scholar John Badgley wrote, "China has demonstrated a long and unusual interest in Burma, and manipulated the major Communist Party there to a greater degree than in any other country."—Lewis, p. 167 ("Burmese Communist Schisms"). Burmese socialism had had an anti-tribal slant as early as 1948, when the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League ousted members of various ethnic minorities, including the Shan, from their Executive Council (*ibid*, p. 154). The subsequent pro-Chinese bias of the BCP must have made it even harder to swallow for Shan nationalists. Caught between Ne Win's Burmese army which aimed to subjugate and exploit them, the BCP which wanted to Sinofy them, and the KMT which actually occupied Shan territory, it is no wonder that a niche developed for warlords such as Khun Sa, for under such circumstances there could be no general law. Even the factions themselves were not stable. Thus the BCP, for instance, tore itself apart in 1969, with "women hacking at the still-living opponents of their husbands and persons bathing their feet in the blood of the executed" (*ibid*, p. 163).

¹⁸ This account jibes with that of Martin Smith, pp. 314-15.

¹⁹ Throughout this interview in particular I have altered the wording and syntax somewhat to make clearer what I believe was the true meaning. D., good and loyal person though she was (oh, she is from south! exclaimed the doctor. She is from near the ocean; she is sea water. The more you drink her, the more thirsty you become!), could not speak English very well, and so her translations left much to be desired. One may won-

der why I chose such a person to work with me on this project. The answer is that I could not have done it without her. She could communicate with others to get my basic purpose across; more importantly, she had a special gift which certain individuals, usually women, seem to possess for alleviating the distrust of others; somehow she could show them the goodness and kindness of her heart, so that they would be willing to take risks and make disclosures for her sake. It is an inspiration to be with someone like that. Finally and most importantly of all, she knew the people who knew people. In short, although certain small details may have been misunderstood or mistranslated, the doctor's basic assertion comes through. That various government and intelligence organizations created their own puppet armies in Burma and financed them by selling opium seems entirely believable, given human and political nature, although it may never be proven. Lt.-Col. James "Bo" Gritz, mentioned below in his own profile, has produced a video entitled "A Nation Betrayed" in which he specifically accuses ex-CIA agent Richard Armitage and others.

²⁰ Here I'm reminded of the Thai soldier I interviewed in Ban Rak Tai. He said that nobody grew opium in that village anymore. —Why doesn't the Thai Air Force bomb Khun Sa? I asked him. —Not in my area, he replied. Not in my country. —Why doesn't the Burmese Air Force do it then?—At this the soldier slowly smiled.

²¹ Why could Karen soldiers come and go? Martin Smith makes the point (p. 299) that the Karen had been enlisted by the Thais in the 1960s in counterinsurgency operations against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The Thai military not only felt that it owed them something, but also considered it wise to let them stay to provide a buffer against possible Burmese aggression.

²² A man had told me, via D.: From Rak Tai village we could go to the black market before. But Khun Sa close the way, because U.S. give Thai army money for fighting with Khun Sa.

²³ A newspaper report I'd read reported that

2,625 metric tons of opium were produced in the Golden Triangle in 1989. Khun Sa controlled more than half of those poppy fields. (One source told me that the Wa put about 1,200 metric tons on the market in that same year.)

²⁴ Pronounced "Ong Dalay."

²⁵ He would step down the following year, after Manerplaw was disastrously lost to the Burmese.

²⁶ Karen I talked to seemed to prefer A-Ks and M-16s. The Shan thought that Kalashnikovs were more reliable than M-16s. How did they gain a professional knowledge of M-16s? There are several possibilities. One is that, following international guerrilla fashion, they called every gun of even approximate M-16 type an M-16. In *Small Arms of the World* we read about the Armalite AR-10, whose beta-test version failed a U.S. military test in 1956 and was subsequently re-engineered. "Delayed acquisition of tooling with which to produce the AR-10 and political considerations kept the weapon from being adopted by a major military power. Small lots of the rifle were sold ... to the Burmese Army by Cooper-Macdonald ... The real significance, however, of the AR-10 is that it led to the AR-15, which after several modifications was adopted by the U.S. Army as the 5.56 mm M 16/M16A1 rifle ..." (pp. 30-31). (*Small Arms Today* does list the AR-10 in the Burmese arsenal [p. 48], with the remark: "Source unknown.") So the Shan might well have obtained some Burmese government AR-10s by hook or by crook. A second possibility is that, as I was assured by a certain high-ranking MTA member, many Vietnam War vintage M-16s had been obtained from corrupt Cambodian soldiers. If so, given the climate and the general level of neglect, it's no wonder that the M-16s didn't work. I have to say that I have my doubts about this. Cambodia is not very conveniently located vis-a-vis Shan State. China would seem far more likely. And in *Small Arms Today* we find both the M16A1 and the AKA-47 listed for that country, the first of U.S. origin ("ca. 5,000 purchased between 1976 and 1977"), the second from Allende's Chile. Given the relatively small

number of Chinese M-16s, the Chinese perhaps sold the Shan the worst ones they had. There is one final possibility: that the people who disparaged the M-16 simply did so to twit me, because I was American and Americans were on the wrong side.

²⁷ The Burmese "Big Brother Number One." One Karen insurgent told me, "Ne Win is like a Pinochet, like a Ceseascu." (Ceauescu?)

²⁸ According to the Shan State National Congress, "in 1949 the Burmese Government, through their racist intransigence, had triggered the Karen rebellion ..." (p. 19). See Chronology. One member of the Karen coalition said: "We are fighting together but for different goals ... The students just come out of the jungle. They want democracy but cannot define it. But some want communism."

²⁹ Tungsten.

³⁰ And did D. agree? Her customary response to any question was absolute silence, so I rarely asked her for any but essential information.

³¹ Shan State is comparable in area to Greece. There are 8,000,000 Shan. (The total population of Myanmar is about a 133 million.)

³² About one-sixth of all Karen are Christian. In the safehouses I saw, the gilded platform for a Buddha usually lay empty.

³³ But according to André and Louis Boucaud, Khun Sa was one of the Karenni's arms suppliers. And the Karenni higher-ups were perhaps not so poor. The Boucaud brothers describe seeing Abel Tweed's deputy showing off canvas bags filled with previous stones dug up by the Karenni soldiers (p. 150).

³⁴ Martin Smith notes that in his many journeys through Karen territory he never saw any poppy growing (pp. 469-70, fn. 35).

³⁵ Díaz, p. 366.

³⁶ For a discussion of this campaign see Callwell, pp. 128-29.

³⁷ See Womack, pp. 138-39. It was called "resettlement" and harked back to previous Spanish, British and American actions.

³⁸ The two French cases cited rarely involved relocation, since it was possible simply to invest the countryside with an apparatus of pickets, patrols and blockhouses, bringing control to the rebellious area itself; the Americans did not have the will, nor the

Burmese the resources, to establish those semi-permanent administrations throughout the country.

³⁹ One American police officer quoted in *American Demographics* says that "in his experience, drugs and alcohol are directly involved in the vast majority of robberies and assaults by strangers" (Cheryl Russell article, August 1995, p. 29). Interestingly enough, Aum Rawley does not make this accusation. May I state the obvious? It is not drugs themselves which somehow "cause" crime, but the *unavailability* of drugs. An argument can thus be made for putting heroin in public vending machines. The likely consequence would be more traffic accidents and fewer violent and nonviolent robberies.

⁴⁰ Opium is a very common ingredient in folk medicines in this region—another reason why the pretty poppy will never become extinct. One cure for baldness involves rubbing on the crown of the head a mixture of raw opium and bamboo juice. Whether it works or not, I'll bet that it feels good.

⁴¹ This anecdote helps explain why despite a formidably malignant purpose it took the Burmese military so many decades to subjugate hill tribes such as the Karenni. Two years after I met the Opium King, the following item appeared in the *Bangkok Post*: "Hungry Burma troops desert campaign against Karenni" (Friday, January 19, 1996, p. 3).

⁴² Also known as Mong Mai.

⁴³ I learned a year later that it was the doctor who had denied us entrance in the first instance, having not see fit to waste "K.S.'"s time with a couple of suspect nobodies; but when Mr. T.'s wife approached him in Ho Mong she said that I was a good person, that I had given a lot of money to Karenni soldiers and refugees. —"Really?" cried the doctor. "You saw with your own eyes? OK, then."—I relate this anecdote simply to encourage other journalists to do the same. Always pay for information as generously as you can; always help the needy when you can. It is their misery, after all, which makes news, and thereby pays your bills.

⁴⁴ He is said to be the son of a Chinese (KMT)

father and a Shan mother. Interestingly enough, even a pro-PULO Thai Muslim politician in Yala (the PULO, profiled in another chapter below, resents Chinese wealth and often targets them for extortion and other crimes), had this to say about Khun Sa when I interviewed him in 1995: "He's a good person. He should do everything he can for his people. He knows that nobody will take care for him [to help him]." The head of the PULO, quoted below, was similarly positive.

⁴⁵ Now that Khun Sa has surrendered to the Burmese, and the MTA is no more, I can tell you that we were in the town of Mae Suriya ("Sun Mother").

⁴⁶ Himself the subject of a profile in this book, in ch. XI, below.

⁴⁷ "Khun Sa has long been contemptuous of his own people," ran an editorial in the *Bangkok Post* (Monday, March 20, 1995, p. 4). "...he has kept farmers in virtual serfdom, dependent on the single and unrewarding crop of opium ... As crop substitution programmes in Thailand and even Laos have given workers opportunity, Khun Sa and his lieutenants have ignored chances to spread freedom."

⁴⁸ I was later told that the census results showed 22,000 "without soldiers" and 40,000 soldiers total. I am skeptical on general principles, because insurgents always inflate their numbers, but it may be true.

⁴⁹ One anonymous source told me that Khun Sa had killed hundreds of people in the process.

⁵⁰ *Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1995, p. 7 ("Burmese army 'to move against drug warlord Khun Sa'" and "Request to detain 9 Khun Sa men dismissed by court").

⁵¹ André and Louis Boucaud, who met Khun Sai, several years earlier, described him as a member of the rival Shan State Army, so presumably he'd belonged to the pro-BCP wing at one time, or even to the BCP itself. As the Chronology to this chapter should make clear, such shifts are far from uncommon. The reader is referred to their book, p. 100.

⁵² According to one story I heard, Khun Sa bore responsibility for the kidnapping and murder of a DEA agent's wife in Chiang Mai.

In 1980 the U.S. offered a reward for Khun Sa's capture. Khun Sa then himself offered rewards for the capture of DEA agents in Thailand. He was indicted by the U.S. for drug trafficking at the end of 1989—a rather pointless exercise. The DEA could doubtless tell me more, but they did not return phone calls when I was writing this.

⁵³ The driver in Mae Hong Song had said that he'd heard from the Karen (and how they knew was beyond me) that Khun Sa's heroin factories were located in high jungle valleys where there was not much water, so Khun Sa supposedly paid men to carry water in.

⁵⁴ "Thomas Constantine, head of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, said recently that South American—mostly Colombian—heroin production accounted for 32 percent of heroin seized in the United States in 1994. Five years ago, nearly all heroin seized came from Asia."—*The Sacramento Bee Final*, Wednesday, July 5, 1995, p. A5 ("Drug cartel leader seized in Colombia").

⁵⁵ All Burma Students' Democratic Front students, "The Real Situation of Burma: Country Report Valid to June 1995" in *Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, pp. 106-06. The students categorically state that in comparison to SLORC atrocities, those of all the insurgent groups are "nothing." Martin Smith writes (p. 308) that "leaving aside the shameful enforced enslavement of tens of thousands of ethnic minority villagers to carry supplies into the firing-line, it was an oddly inefficient way of fighting a modern war."

⁵⁶ I remember Lt.-Col. Gritz telling me: "He has a prison cell that is a little hole and then a big dome dug out in the ground, deep in the ground so that nobody's gonna get out, and of course snakes and scorpions and all kinds of things fall in there."

⁵⁷ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* p. 250.

⁵⁸ "To 'understand' them makes us all too prone to pity them" [which I do—WTV], "but pity only makes us feel superior to those who harm us, so that we end up denying their hatred and their contempt" (Gruen, p. 144). I disagree.

⁵⁹ According to the All Burma Students'

Democratic Front students, "control is buttressed by selective restrictions on contact with foreigners, surveillance of government employees and private citizens, harassment of political activists, intimidation, arrest, detention and physical abuse" (*Burma Research Journal*, p. 94.) The fist was, however, becoming velvet-gloved. One political economist, Prof. Dr. Khin Maung Kyii, wrote a year later: "It is now fairly clear that the military have set out to determine the future power configuration by seeking a format that would legitimize their participation while accommodating to some extent the popular demand for democracy" (*Burma Research Journal*, p. 30).

⁶⁰ Dan Smith, p. 47, map 16 ("After the Raj").

⁶¹ Martin Smith, p. 101.

⁶² One source even reports Lo Hsing-Han to actually be a successor of Khun Sa. Lo Hsing-Han was never Khun Sa. He actually was head of the Kokang Home Guard, and preferentially supported for awhile by SLORC over Khun Sa. Later he was extradited, imprisoned, and eventually rehabilitated. I never asked Khun Sa what his other names might be. The MTA's booklet on Khun Sa does confirm the other name Chang Si-Fu, but insists that "Khun Sa" is not a mere *nom de guerre* (Khun Sa, p. 46.)

⁶³ Martin Smith, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p. 266.

⁶⁵ Martin Smith, loc. cit.

⁶⁶ Op. cit., p. 37.

⁶⁷ Khun Sa, p. 61 ("To the People of Shan State").

⁶⁸ As the Wa general, Ta Khun Mong, had said to me in Ban Rak Tai when I'd asked him if the Wa and the Shan were enemies: The people is no problem. Only for the head [leader] is it problem.

⁶⁹ This was not quite true. After Khun Sa's surrender two years later, the Wa were supposedly beginning to fill the opium vacuum.

⁷⁰ Of 12 February 1947.

⁷¹ These words, which sounded so vague to me at the time, due to my ignorance of Buddhism, now hold more significance for me. I believe that Khun Sa was making an allusion to the Buddha's First Sermon at Benares, also known as the Setting in Motion

of the Wheel of the Law: "Verily, it is this Ariyan [noble] eightfold way, to wit: Right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This, monks, is that middle path which giveth vision, which giveth knowledge, which causeth calm, special knowledge, enlightenment, [Nirvana]."—Boisselier, pp. 130-131.

⁷² If this were true, why would it be true? One might quote two excerpts from the U.S. government final report on the Waco siege: (1) "After Congress and the courts expanded permissible military assistance to civilian law enforcement and the Defense Department assumed the lead in the war on drugs, military assistance to law enforcement greatly increased. This increased use of military personnel is most noticeable with the National Guard because of fewer legal restrictions on its use" (U.S. H.R. Committee on Government Reform, V.I.B). (2) "Civilian law enforcement's increasing use of militaristic tactics is unacceptable. The FBI's and ATF's reliance on military type tactics greatly concerns the subcommittees. The Waco and Ruby Ridge incidents epitomize civilian law enforcement's growing acceptance and use of military type tactics. The subcommittees find this trend unacceptable" (ibid, V.E). But does the subcommittee see the connection between (1) and (2)?

⁷³ Not, however, to Dr. Chao-Tzang (Yawnghwe), who insists in his article "Shan Opium Politics (Khun Hsa Factor)" that only the middlemen win in the opium trade, and "the losers are obviously Shan primary producers at one end, and, at the other, the millions of addicts in the cities of the affluent West" (*Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, p. 64).

⁷⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Gritz told me in October 1994: "Khun Sa has never lied to me. Everything he said he is willing to do. He is better on that score than a lot of American politicians."—On the other hand, when I mentioned the alleged 43 assassination attempts, he said: "If they did, they weren't trying too hard, were they? Not when we can drop a bomb on Khadaffi's daughter."—Griz

is convinced that the DEA has colluded with Khun Sa in the distribution of heroin. It seems quite possible to me that there might have been cooperation at one time and attempted assassination at another. One thing I won't forget is the fear that everyone evinced upon learning that I was American.

⁷⁵ To quote Ta Khun Mong once more (we were sitting around plastic bags of fresh black mushrooms): If the government talk something, the people is believe too much. But I am small people. What I say, they don't believe. —Evidently to the U.S.A. Khun Sa is "small people."

⁷⁶ The stupid "war on drugs" in America was certainly responsible for creating a great number of criminals. In 1995, for instance, about 15.1 million arrests were made in the U.S. for all offenses except traffic infractions. The two highest arrest categories were for theft-larceny and for drug offenses. Of these latter, a high proportion involved narcotics possession or sales (FBI, p. 207).

⁷⁷ This is a reference to the U.S.-supported spraying of the dangerous Agent Orange ingredient 2,4-D on the part of the Burmese.

⁷⁸ Two months later, Radio Rangoon claimed that 9,000 Karen had already left camps in Thailand to return to Myanmar (*Bangkok Post*, March 4, 1995, p. 7 ["Burma says 9,000 Karen refugees returned home"]).

⁷⁹ Cf., for instance, Dr. Chao-Tzang (Yawnghwe), "Shan Opium Politics; Khun Hsa Factor," in *Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, pp. 61-72. Describing him as a "very small fish indeed," Dr. Chao-Tzang presents the Opium King as a manifestation rather than a shaper of complex political forces, and as a Benedict Arnold who changed from pro-Burmese to pro-Shan and back again. But even this author acknowledges his "growing Shan nationalism."

⁸⁰ Khun Sa, p. 50.

⁸¹ Prof. Dr. Khin Maung Kyi, writing from the Burmese point of view, remarks upon the serious danger to SLORC (or any Burmese government) of "the informal granting of semi-autonomous status to the armed ethnic groups in their own territories" (*Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995,

p.39). His fear was that these groups, such as the Shan, would confederate with adjacent markets such as Thailand, rather than with Burma itself. Sadly for me, this fear seemed unfounded. The merchandise I saw was not from Shan State, but from Pagan.

⁸² See, for instance, Kambawza Win, "Burma in Thai Foreign Policy." in *Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, pp. 75, 87-88. It is interesting that the Thais could not deal directly with the Karenni to log in these areas, the way they could with that other insurgent group, the Khmer Rouge. I assume this is because the Karenni were simply not as strong as the Khmer Rouge.

⁸³ The right thing to do would have been to ask him to roll up his trouser cuff so that I could photograph the stump; I was getting quite a nice collection of land mine injury images from Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Bosnia; maybe someday I could open a gallery; but unfortunately I'd begun to lose my professional drive. To hell with journalism.

⁸⁴ Half a year later, the *Bangkok Post* claimed that the population of Ho Mong had dropped from 18,000 to 4,000, and that Khun Sa's "hundreds of boy soldiers" had gone home. "Formerly well stocked shops are facing a hard time, so is the karaoke bar, the brothel has already closed, the women have returned to Thailand ... The Burmese want to convert the 100-bed hospital into a telecommunications center. They found the building almost empty as doctors and patients had fled their arrival ... They have not occupied Khun Sa's hilltop 'white house' as he used to call it ..."—Wednesday, July 24, 1996, p. 3 ("Shan State adjusting to changing realities").

⁸⁵ An accurate assessment. "The Chinese military, investment and political machine," says the *Bangkok Post*, "has its fingers deep in every slice of the Burmese pie" (Wednesday, July 24, 1996, p. 4, "Post Opinion": "Around the World").

⁸⁶ Martin Smith claims to have met both Thai and Burmese officers at Khun Sa's military bases, and says that the reason Khun Sa was so rarely attacked during the 1980s was that he had a narcotics business going with the Burmese (p. 315).

⁸⁷ Martin Smith (p. 39) claims that in 1985, talks between Khun Sa's TRC, the precursor of the MTA, and the KNU broke down because the Karen attacked Khun Sa's Chinese ancestry.

⁸⁸ Martin Smith writes that "all these parties, including Khun Sa and the Tatmadaw, started out with varying degrees of political sincerity, but have inevitably become tainted by the endemic corruption of the international narcotics trade" (p. 315). A number of MTA members apparently came to agree with this in 1995, and left the organization before Khun Sa's surrender.

YAKUZA LIVES

¹ In September 1998, US \$1 was worth about 128 yen, so 12,000,000 yen would have been around \$9,400. The exchange rate has fluctuated considerably in recent years, so this could have been a thousand more or less.

² Many of the Yakuza with whom I talked said that such gentlemen's agreements were now growing rare. They blamed this on harsher police activity as a result of American pressure. Soon, they said, the Yakuza parents would no longer feel obligated to surrender their children. Then the Yakuza would resemble the Mafia.

³ My friend Masahiko Shimada, novelist and habitué of "the floating world," always said that Kabukicho was not Japanese but Chinese and Korean, with a steadily increasing number of Russian prostitutes.

⁴ I once paid eighty dollars to get inside one of those Japanese-only bars: thirty dollars for me, thirty for my interpreter, kind Takako, without whose national essence I wouldn't have been allowed in, and twenty for one of the bargirls (or, as it turned out, two for the price of one) so that there would at least be someone of whom to ask questions. In exchange for this, Takako and I received an all-you-can-drink half hour, which translated into two glasses apiece of watery Scotch in the corner of a subterranean room air-conditioned and dim whose blackness glowed darker with all the bathing suits of the prostitutes who

stood along the bar, each of them refusing to let me photograph her because she was working "secretly" as it was put. All the other establishments which lured customers underground were Yakuza, they said; this was the only safe one. Yeah, yeah, I thought. They had literally boxed us into a corner, and everybody kept warning me that these establishments often charged people ten or 100 times what they had expected, in order to extort their watches, jewelry, everything, before permitting them to escape. Takako clutched her purse on her lap, ready to flee, except that she was behind a table and between me and the wall. I felt pretty relaxed, having insisted on paying in advance and getting a receipt. Later I went to another hostess bar with the private detective, who after the first brandy began singing Elvis Presley songs. When I showed the girls all the business cards I'd obtained from the Yakuza by then, they became very alarmed and asked me why I consorted with bad people.

⁵ Until recently, depiction of pubic hair was indictable in Japan. Even now, pornographic magazines are supposed to black out clear depictions of genitalia, but this law, which I used to see applied mainly to female genitals, is becoming more and more frequently flouted. In the sleazy magazine stores of Kabukicho one could find any number of wet split beaver shots. All that happened was that the police would send a warning to the publisher, who'd write a letter of apology. — Typically Japanese! laughed Takako.

⁶ I asked whether he was tired of sexual images yet, and he didn't answer. Later he told me how on a two-week visa he'd visited his brother-in-law in Los Angeles, and there'd been a misunderstanding and so he'd found himself once more on his own, this time in a land stranger than any other. What was there to do but try to get a taxi, which he could *not* get, he complained, because American taxi drivers discriminated against Japanese? And so he took a 100-dollar limousine instead—straight to a strip club. Now I knew why he'd stayed so long in Kabukicho. The lust and seediness of the place was within him now and maybe always had been. When the busman pays for

his holiday, we assume he likes buses. The table cloths were dirty in that Los Angeles club, and it was full of "Mexicans," whom he'd never seen before. He was uneasy. But then the man next to him pulled out a 100-dollar bill and asked for girls and at once they changed the table cloth and everything was wonderful. That was his story, which he told with a smile as seraphic as that of the infant which has just defecated. It was his moment of fulfillment, as perhaps was this one, for I never said no, no matter how many drinks he ordered.

⁷ Kobe (1995).

⁸ Usually a masculine name. In the magazine version of this story, on my translator's advice, I changed her name to Kazuko.

⁹ In writing this story I was continually warned by my go-betweens to avoid "mixing up" Mr. Suzuki and anybody else.

¹⁰ Chris Taylor, p. 211 ("Places to Stay: Top End").

¹¹ He was far less polished than that other rebellious schoolboy, Mr. Inouye, whose care and fluency with words had astounded my private detective. One of the Japanese who was present at the interview with Mr. Suzuki later told me that his speech was "vulgar," by which he meant not obscene but rude and ungraceful. His grating, growling voice perhaps added to this impression. But Takako, my translator, was taken with him. She said that everything he said was good, and that she admired his determination.

¹² He had nothing against prostitution because "mostly the girls are not forced to do it"—an axiom with which I agree. He was against all drugs except marijuana.

¹³ He claimed that as long as the photographs portrayed only non-Japanese children and as long as a Japanese possessed only a single copy of each, the police would not cause any difficulties—a statement borne out by other people in Kabukicho. At my request, the street agent brought me a fat envelope of child pornography for examination. Every magazine was German or Dutch. The texts were usually in English. All of them displayed sexual acts involving Caucasian, Hispanic and black children. Not a single Asian child was represented.

INTRODUCTION: EUROPE

¹ I use "Yugoslavian" as an adjective and "Yugoslav" to mean a national of Yugoslavia.

² See above, "Defense of Homeland," where a refugee from Struga clings to her homeland with the utmost literalism; this victim of "ethnic cleansing" has carried with her a handful of home dirt.

³ See below, "The War Never Came Here."

⁴ Moral calculus, 5.1.7, 5.2.F.1, 5.2.F., 6.2.F.

⁵ Later on in the same account, Dave writes: "We need more information here, more background. Who would evacuate the students and how? How are they getting food in the meantime? How did you get in if they can't get out?" Who would evacuate them indeed? That was what I wanted to know, and you will read the answer. How are they getting food? They got the same rations that the others in that hungry city got, food smuggled in and food flown in by the United Nations, and if that wasn't good enough for them, there were always cabbages growing in the dirt. How did I get in if they can't get out? That's the real question, isn't it? That's the question which haunts every journalist who passes in and out of other people's misery. How am I safe when others are not? Why do I live when they die?

⁶ Moral calculus, 1.3.1-1.3.13.

⁷ Perhaps I should have prepared another Annex detailing this period, and yet, as I keep saying, World War II seemed almost more real for many of the people I met in ex-Yugoslavia than their present war. The atrocities which had just been committed by Serbs in Vukovar led their enemies to seek retribution, but they weren't Serbs; they were "Chetniks," ghosts from 1943. So in these case studies I decided to let the beginning of the war simply imply itself, as it were. The unfortunate result is my failure to consider the rights and wrongs of secession as I did in the case of the American Civil War (see above, "Defense of Authority"). Judging that must once again be your task.

⁸ For mention of Muslim children being raised to plot revenge against their Serbian aggressors, and some implications of this

phenomenon, see above, "Deterrence, Retribution and Revenge."

WHERE ARE ALL THE PRETTY GIRLS?

¹ Pronounced "hoss."

² *Za Dom Spremni!* Another translation is: "Ready for the Homeland!"

³ In Sarajevo that year my interview at the HOS office was off the record, but I can record the following facts: (1) The Commandant wore a black shirt buttoned to the neck. (2) He was with a blonde who wore a cross at her throat and got disgusted when I complimented her in Russian, the Communist language, the language (as she put it) of the Serbs. (3) The security guard, attired in uniform and gun, gave us a Hitler salute. That was how it was. The HOS man in his dark suit poured coffee bit by bit. He had a quiet voice and a pale face. He said: "The HOS people in Sarajevo do not actually want any media coverage."

⁴ The Burmese dissident (and Nobel Peace Prize winner) Aung San Suu Kyi writes that when culture "is bent to serve narrow interests it becomes static and rigid, its exclusive aspects come to the fore and it assumes coercive overtones. The national culture can become a bizarre graft of carefully selected historical incidents and distorted social values intended to justify the policies and actions of those in power."—"Empowerment for a Culture of Peace and Development," in *Burma Research Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1995, pp. 50-51.

⁵ *Squadra*. Fascist Italy had groups called the Squadristi in World War II.

⁶ The police chief in Krajina, whose interview is described at the end of this chapter, said: "A Chetnik is a wrong name for a Serb soldier. It's bad word. Here is no Chetniks and never was. During the Second World War, Chetniks have been in Serbia. They were fighting for their King, against Tito and socialism, and for capitalism. In the Republic of Serbia, 'Chetnik' is something positive: a soldier who fights for his country. But we

have no connection with the Chetniks. We are just Serbs." According to the historian Josip Tomasevitch, who traces the word back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and beyond, "the term Chetnik derives from the word *ceta* (pl. *cete*), a company of soldiers or a group of men engaged in guerrilla warfare, and simply means a guerrilla fighter" (op. cit., p. 115). For an interview with self-professed Chetniks, see the chapter "The War Never Came Here," below. See also Annex F.

⁷ There is a grain of truth in Adnan's characterization of Yugoslav Communists as Serbian and Montenegrin opportunists. (Serbs and Montenegrins have traditionally felt very close, and after the civil war of 1991 began, only Serbia and Montenegro remained in Yugoslavia. It is, as the Marxists would say, "no accident" that Tito's then-loyal substitute, Milovan Djilas, told Stalin a pro-Montenegrin, anti-"Turk" [Muslim] joke. Djilas was a Montenegrin married to a Serb (*Conversations with Stalin*). He referred to his own language as "Serbian," not "Serbo-Croatian." Djilas refers to the "subordinate position of Croats and Croatia" even in 1947 (*Rise and Fall*, p. 142). Most astonishingly of all, Djilas refers, as do nationalist Serbs in the present civil war, to the Battle of Kosovo, "which had inaugurated five centuries of Turkish rule over the Serbian people," and "cut into the minds and hearts of all us Serbs" (ibid, p. 201). And yet we must not forget that the Chetniks were the arch Serbian hegemonists, and that Tito fought against and liquidated them.

⁸ Tito was used by all sides as the Bible is used, to justify and explain anything. In 1994, when I was in Belgrade, Zoran Petrovic-Pirocanac of the Southeast Center for Geopolitical Studies said to me: "I compare Izetbegovic [the Bosnian leader] with Tito. What role was Tito's role from Comintern? Until the end he was with Moscow!" "But Stalin excommunicated him!," I exclaimed. "But if he was really against Stalin, why did he turn down membership in the EEC in 1968?" And a pamphlet published by the Serbian Ministry of Information explained how "the Yugoslav

communist leadership, in which Croats and Slovenes (Josip Broz [= Tito], Edvard Kardelj, Vladimir Bakarić) had the main say, manipulated with [sic] the national question, dissolved the Serbian nation's ethnic unity..." (Terzić, p. 4).

⁹ Here I am reminded of Tomasevitch's assessment of their 1940s predecessors: "The Ustasha Militia... which was a party army, composed of fully indoctrinated volunteers and devoted to Pavelić, was excellent as a combat force; it was at the same time, however, extremely unruly and undisciplined and therefore almost constantly at odds with the regular Croatian army and with the German commanders in Croatia" (op. cit., p. 108).

¹⁰ Lucan, p. 5 (I.72).

¹¹ There is more, of course. When a man like the man from Bosanska Gradiska tells you a story, there is always more, because the cup of atrocities cannot be drained in a single swig. Was it truth or was it lies? I never got to Bosanska Gradiska to verify the story. But I believe him. The man said that he had been placed in a convoy of the ethnically cleansed after having been required to sign over all his belongings to "the Serbian people." Then they got to a customs checkpoint at the border, a bashed-up van. The man said: "We were checked thoroughly for four and a half hours. They stripped naked all the men and women. They took all the hidden gold, all the jewelry. Those who were physically fit [sic] were first beaten up and told, 'Fuck you and your Muslim mother.' Then they were forced to lie down naked on the earth, and chew grass while the Serbs kicked their sides. The Serbs said: 'Do you animals now understand that you can't have a country, that everything here is Serbian?' They took the diapers off kids to check for gold. They didn't physically abuse them, but called them bastards, weeds of the Serbian nation that needed to be uprooted. Then they delivered us to UNPROFOR in the town of Okučani.")

¹² I met a man who might or might not have been a gypsy. He knew gypsies who'd stolen weapons right out of a Serbian barracks surrounded by Croats. A pistol was 1500 DM; an automatic rifle manufactured in Zagreb was

300-500 DM; a Kalashnikov was 700 DM.

¹³ "Because Croatia haven't enough weapons," Adnan had said. "They have only a few. Serbia have thousands more. They have all weapons of old Yugoslavia." According to the 1984 edition of *Small Arms Today*, almost all the "weapons of old Yugoslavia" had been made at the state factory Zavodi Cervená Zlatava, in the city of Kragujevac, which is about 60 miles due south of Belgrade and hence remains in Serbian control. A few machine guns and one automatic cannon were of Soviet manufacture, surprisingly enough, given the ideological coolness (the Soviets must have needed the hard currency), and one machine gun, the famous HK MP5, was German made. After Croatia seceded I would imagine there might have been more weapons obtainable from Germany in the black market.

¹⁴ Mr. Dave Eggers, reading *Rising Up and Rising Down* in 2003, writes here: "It would be helpful to remind us what Vukovar means and also what Sarajevo means." He is right. In 1992, Vukovar meant atrocity, an atrocity committed by Serbs. Sarajevo meant atrocity in progress, emergency.

¹⁵ The name "Kalashnikov" is often used to refer to the AK-47 design and does not necessarily assume Russian manufacture. "In addition to the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, North Korea, Hungary and Yugoslavia have manufactured the AK47," notes Ezell's *Small Arms of the World*, p. 36. Finland and Israel use similar designs.

¹⁶ Quite probably a KPV HMG (see "The Skulls on the Shelves"), since that was more often used for anti-aircraft purposes than that other Yugoslavian automatic cannon, the ZU-23.

¹⁷ Prentiss, p. 662.

¹⁸ "The [World War II] Chetnik leaders and their followers were extremely conservative and traditional-minded," writes Tomasevitch (pp. 192-93). "Not only in much of their military thinking but also in their garb and their long hair and beards, and, often, in the willful behavior of many commanders, they harked back to the experiences of the Serbian

Chetnik detachments in Macedonia in pre-1912 days..."

¹⁹ Bosnia i Hercegovina.

²⁰ Everyone in Zagreb and Sarajevo seemed to regard UNPROFOR as a malicious joke. Partly this was because everybody was partisan, and so each resented it when UNPROFOR did not intervene in his interest. Partly it was because UNPROFOR was genuinely incompetent. According to some French soldiers in Split, the day after a UN convoy was ambushed, UNPROFOR sent out another—unarmored. In Belgrade, as I found in 1994, they did not think of UNPROFOR as a joke, only as malicious. There is little doubt that, like so many bureaucracies, UNPROFOR contained, sluggish, spineless and callous elements. And yet there were also people there who strove to do good. The real problem was the same in Bosnia as in Somalia or any other hot zone in which UN personnel might be sent for a period long enough to generate antipathies on the part of the "occupied." As time went on, even the U.S. press, so quick to condone each of the UN's adventures as it began, grew harsh on the subject of Yugoslavia. On Saturday, July 15, 1995, after the Bosnian Serbs captured the first Muslim "safe haven," *The Los Angeles Times* remarked: "The loss of the Sebrenica enclave, one of six established by the United Nations in 1993 to protect civilians from ethnic warfare, represents a disastrous humiliation for the United Nations, whose mission here appears doomed" (quoted in *The Sacramento Bee* Final, p. A1). As an American judge once complained, "The original scheme of the United Nations charter, whereby force would be deployed by the United Nations itself, in accordance with the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter, has never come into effect. Therefore an essential element in the Charter design is totally missing."—Dissenting opinion of Stephen M. Schwebel to the International Court of Justice's decision against the U.S.A., quoted in Reisman and Antoniou. It is sad to see that Judge Schwebel was using this demonstrable truism regarding the UN's most important weakness to buttress an evil interpretation, namely, that the U.S. was acting in "self-

defense" in assisting the contras who committed acts of terror and atrocity within Nicaragua. But perhaps this validates his point still more. If the UN were truly able to deploy overpowering force to execute its decisions, then perhaps the U.S. would have hesitated to arm and fund the contras. Count von Moltke's opinion, written in 1880, that any multinational body such as the UN would be "suitable only to create Babylonian confusion" (op. cit., p. 25), is far less of an exaggeration than it ought to be. "It is better not to mention the United Nations," writes Elie Wiesel (intro. to Hukanovic, pp. vi-vii). "Charged with the protection of the weak, this organization demonstrates its own weakness." At any rate, one memory of UNPROFOR that will never leave me is my first one, in Zagreb, when I was told sternly, "Your accreditation card must be laminated. It must not be plasticized."

²¹ One superb photograph by Emmanuel Ortiz (op. cit., p. 15), depicting a young sniper in Karlovac in 1991, might be a metonym for the entire war. We see the sniper from the back, and he is additionally isolated from us by a glass window. Crouching on a balcony, he holds his eye against the scope, surveying a street we can't see. The most distinctive part of him is his ponytail, his *queue de cheval*. He resembles a broadcaster on the air in a radio studio, affecting many people and yet strangely less expressive or potent the closer we come to him. Close enough, and we could snatch the rifle from his hand, or shoot him in the back of the head...

²² Ivic, p. 1. I assume that the Serbian Council Information Center was affiliated with, or at least representative of the views of, the government of the Serbian Republic, because a functionary at a government office handed me a copy. Another Serbian pamphlet reads: "... the Interior Ministry of Croatia sent in special police squads to the Knin Krajina to thwart the plebiscite. Serbs responded by putting up barricades. This is how on 17 August a war broke out over Krajina" (_____, *Chronology of the Crisis in the Former SFRY*, p. 3; italics in original).

²³ Krajina fell to the Croats in October 1995.

²⁴ Now the army of Serbia and Montenegro.

²⁵ Throughout the Balkans, of course, the tale of inter-ethnic atrocities over the centuries is as rooted in collective memory as the hideous reprisals following the Vendée uprising of 1793-94 continue to be in France. There is something to be said for the American ignorance of history: at least it won't provoke reprisals.

²⁶ I recall the Croatian woman who described Tito's regime in a shout: "Any position or company of importance, it's all Serbs—Serbs, Serbs, Serbs!"

²⁷ The police chief was listing the surname first. He said that Grujic was born on 18 February 1950 and was the father of two, that Ivosevic was born in 1946, lived at Subeliosova 1, had two children, that Pajic was born in 1956, lived in Zaparesic near Zagreb, and had one child.

²⁸ One constantly heard on all three sides the reiteration of the view that "destruction of Yugoslavia did not begin in 1990 or 1991, but in 1941, and the present stage is only a last one in that process" (Avramov, p. 18). See Annex G.

THE WAR NEVER CAME HERE

¹ Territorial Defense Force.

² United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General*, p. 3, para. 9.

³ Trotsky made this same journey eighty-two years earlier and wrote: "Although the railway line from Budapest to Belgrade proceeds mainly in a southerly direction, from the cultural standpoint one moves eastward."—Dispatch of 4 October 1912, in *The Balkan Wars*, p. 58.

⁴ This description of mobilization in ex-Yugoslavia has, I believe, a large measure of truth. It has also a considerable heap of explanatory convenience. The psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar notes: "In Indian towns and cities where there have been riots between Hindus and Muslims, I have normally found that 'men of goodwill' from both communities invariably attribute the riots to the machinations... of politicians... rather than to any increase in primordial conflicts, a perspective

which is also shared by people who are far removed from the conflict. The instrumentalist theory of ethnic mobilization... in concentrating on the instigators,... underplays or downright denies that there are 'instigatees,' too, whose participation is essential to transform conflicts between religious groups into violence" (p. 193). Shrewd as this is, we shouldn't underplay the fact that at times there are in fact instigators. The power of such trickery was noted by, among other people, Hitler, who was quick to accuse "the Jew," "the international maggot nations," of them (*Mein Kampf*, p. 556) while engaging in them himself.

⁵ During World War II the Partisans called the Chetniks "slaughterers" because their preferred method of killing was throat-slitting.

⁶ Noel Malcolm, p. 252.

⁷ Van Loon, p. 270.

⁸ My prewar *Britannica* says: "Language is generally the criterion of nationality. Some nine-tenths of the population speak Slavic languages, and three-quarters of these speak Serbo-Croatian. The Serbs use the Cyrillic alphabet and the Croats use the Latin, but the conversion is relatively simple... Religious differences, coupled with varying linguistic and ethnic affiliations, have strongly molded the country's social and political life and have occasioned fierce conflicts. The split between the Serbs and Croats, who, although speaking the same language, adhered respectively to Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic persuasions, was particularly deep" (15th ed., 1976, vol. 19, p. 1103). During an ugly surge of nationalism in 1967, when Tito was still alive, several Croatian groups called for the recognition of the "Croatian" language; Serbian extremists immediately mirrored them. "The government came down hard on the signatories of both of these ridiculous documents" (West, p. 297). As in any other area with distinct ethnic groups, dialects do exist. Thus the man from Novi Sad told me: "Serbs from Belgrade talk always in a rush, careless like gangsters, while Serbs from Vojvodina talk slow and stupid like Americans, like you."

⁹ *The Reuters Library Report*, February 2, 1994,

"Zhirinovskiy says 18 Moslems will die in weapons test," by Mark Trevelyn.

¹⁰ My *Britannica* says that Serbia lost 23 percent of her population in World War I. My experience in wars is that all sides tend to exaggerate the sums of their martyrdom. At any rate, the numbers are always different. Here is how a left-wing Serb—no friend either to Milosevic, to Vineta's party, or to Serbia's enemies, told me the same tale: "The Serbs and the Jews are very gifted nations. But there is one difference. There is always some Holocaust, but over the ages only the best of the Jews survive. But only the worst of the Serbs survive, because they always have to protect their own country, and the best go to fight with the Turks. The First Balkan War, the Second Balkan War, the Third Balkan War, and then the First World War—seventy percent of the male population of Serbia got killed!—and then the Second World War when we were again fighting Germany and Croats killed one and a half million Serbs—and did you know what Churchill said? He said: We will fight Germans to the last Serb! And then came Communism, and Tito, with his concentration camp at Goli Otok, so it's no wonder that now only the bad people are left." Still another source (Prentiss, *Chemicals in War*, p. 651) approaches the question from the standpoint of the number actually *mobilized*, records the total number of casualties (defined as battle deaths, nonbattle deaths, wounded, prisoners and missing) then calculates the resulting casualty percentages. For Serbia, the *total* casualty figure was 46.8 percent, or 331,106 (a little shy of Vineta's five million). For Montenegro, the number was 40 percent; for the hated British Empire, 34.3 percent. According to this source, however, Serbia had by no means the highest casualty rate. That honor belonged to France, at 75.3 percent, followed by Rumania and Russia, respectively. Arthur Banks in his military atlas gives the lower figures of 48,000 killed and 133,500 wounded in Serbia, and 3,000 killed and 10,000 wounded in Montenegro ("Military Casualties of the 1914-1918 War," p. 100). Banks lists civilian

casualties for those two countries as 70,000 killed in Serbia, and 700 killed in Montenegro (p. 101). If we total up his four death-numbers we get 121,700—still a bit less than five million. Whether a quarter or half or three-quarters of the Serbs died in World War I, of course, is almost irrelevant—degrees of horror which I will never be able to make sense of. Halfway through his memoirs Trotsky recalls: "In Vienna [in 1914], the inscription '*Alle Serben müssen sterben*' [All Serbs must die] appeared on the hoardings, and the words became the cry of the street boys" (*My Life*, p. 233).

¹¹ According to Malcolm (op. cit., p. 192), the Serbs lost 7.3 percent of their people in World War II, and the Muslims 8.1 percent. See Appendix F.

¹² As I reread this chapter in 1997, I'm reminded of the cynical memoir of one American academic who assisted with a documentary on the Korean War: "The value of the North Koreans was not for 'balance,' though that was the justification for the effort to get them [included]... Their real value [was] that they bring to the film an authenticity and immediacy that inevitably shocks the Western viewer" (Cumings, p. 209). The Sarajevo story may seem like an illustration of this; but in my experience, most reporting was far, far baser. In 1992 and again in 1994 I had considerable difficulty in finding American or western European journalists who were willing to consider that Serbia might have any case at all. Tempting as it has sometimes been to add hindsighted remarks, in the case of my ex-Yugoslavia chapters, as in my other case studies, I have done so only in the footnotes. It is too easy to revise history. Was the Sarajevo story absurd? Yes, it was, but I was the only one who was willing to report it.

¹³ I remember an afternoon in Sarajevo in 1992 (I had planned to return there in 1994, but, as I shall relate, circumstances made that impossible) when I was sitting in the apartment of my driver's new ladyfriend. The apartment used to belong to Serbs. — "Probably out there fighting us!" the militia-man shouted. The Japanese cabinet had flow-

ers on it and a clock ticking, not a single window broken, everything eerily perfect (outside everything was smashed), and the militiaman sat looking around him in disgust and said: "Typically Serb! Just joking. I don't know." He slid his pistol in and out of the holster, pointed it at the Serbs' furniture, and laughed, "Pow-pow-pow-pow-pow!"—Then the blonde came back in. —Nice legs, said the militiaman. Her former apartment had been on the Serbian side. She said that the Serbs had destroyed everything. She said dully: "A girl who works for my husband got shot in a car yesterday by snipers..."—We were drinking up the Serbs' slivovitz. I said to the woman: "If I ever get to Belgrade, what do you want me to say to the people there?"—"Just ask them: Do they know the real situation in Sarajevo?" she began quietly enough. "Do they know there's an outstanding aggression? Ask anyone in Belgrade what they'd feel if they had to do what I have to do. I'm wearing a Serbian woman's skirt because I have no clothes. How would a typical Belgrade woman like it if everything she'd had she had no more?"—When the woman said these things, her lips grew back from her teeth, her voice rose and her fingers curled into claws.

¹⁴ The Americans said that the bad Serbs were shelling the defenseless Muslims in Gorazde. The Serbs said that the bad Muslims of Gorazde were attacking Serbs (or, as Hazbo Medovic, Vice President of the Serbian Socialist Party in Sanzak, put it to me: "It's a UN zone but it was not demilitarized, in keeping with plans for Alija Izetbegovic's spring offensive, so we had to retaliate"). UNPROFOR's Division of Information briefing for 21 April 1994 had reported that the Serbs "repeatedly targeted" the hospital in Gorazde. The Serbs got a bulls-eye on the emergency room. "Asked about a claim by Dr. Karadzic that there were combat units stationed in the hospital in Gorazde, Mr. Nerzig," the press officer, "said he had no information to suggest there were combat units there" (pp. 1-2, paras. 2, 8).

¹⁵ The whole poem is reproduced in the Southeast Centre for Geopolitical Studies' *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Chronicle of an Annotated*

Death, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁷ Malcolm, p. 220.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 219.

¹⁹ See the Appendix for a high-level Serbian account of how the Bosnian war happened.

²⁰ More than three years after writing this, I happened to read that police in Sarajevo confiscated copies of the satirical periodical *Politka* for portraying Izetbegovic as Tito on the cover. "Street vendors reported receiving threatening phone calls and were summoned for questioning by the police" (*Index on Censorship*, vol. 26, no. 4, issue 177; July/August 1997, p. 105; "Index", entry for Bosnia-Herzegovina).

²¹ The Yugoslavian constitution of 1945 states that that nation "is composed of people equal in rights, who on the basis of a right to self-determination, including the right to secede, have expressed their will to live in a federated unit" (Djilas, *Rise and Fall*, p. 32).

²² Warren Zimmermann, "The Last Ambassador: A Memoir of the Collapse of Yugoslavia," in *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1995, pp. 16-17. Zimmermann, by the way, believes that Izetbegovic is not an extremist. His sympathies are ranked in the following order: first, Muslims, very distantly second, Croats, and distinctly last, Serbs.

²³ Glenny, p. 166. In connection with that bitter fighting the *Oxford Companion to World War II* mentions "western Bosnia, where the Serbian peasantry had suffered most"

²⁴ Djilas, *Wartime*, p. 356.

²⁵ One of the most unfair aspects of contemporary Western press coverage is the implication that Serbs have no territorial rights whatsoever in Bosnia. Here is a characterization written more than a decade before the civil war, which means that it is hard to accuse it of bias in that war: "Bosnia-Herzegovina, the most recently acquired Habsburg domain with the proportionally largest Serb population..." (Kann, p. 529). The time reference is to the early years of the twentieth century. Again, this does not justify atrocities, but it may justify aspirations.

²⁶ This was a region of Bosnia where great numbers of Muslims were murdered by Serb

and Croat irregulars during World War II. (Interestingly enough, Foca was Tito's headquarters in 1941. I wish I knew whether the Muslims were killed by the Partisans themselves or by the Ustasa who attacked the Partisans there and drove them back to Serbia. It is unclear to what extent the killings were motivated by ethnicity, and to what extent by ideology.) According to Imamovic and Mahmutcehajic, over 120,000 Muslims were murdered in Bosnia in World War II. Modern genocide against the Bosnian Muslims comes from "the desire of the Balkan ruling ideologies, particularly Serbian and Montenegrin, to create their own ethnically pure territories by exterminating Bosnian Muslims." This is one of the pieces of Muslim literature which Vineta gave me and which she called "crap." The former Partisan Milovan Djilas claims in his memoir that the Ustasa, "among them a good number of Moslem toughs," had started it, killing a dozen only sons from well-known Serbian families; while in a neighboring village they slit Serbs' throats over a vat. Then the Chetniks committed reprisals. Djilas heard the figure of 400 Serbs and 3,000 Muslims murdered in Foca. "Yet," he adds, "judging by the devastation of a large number of villages, it seems that many more Serbs were killed" (*Wartime*, p. 139). See Annex H. In short, both Serbs and Muslims would have had good reason to hate each other in Foca, and the "promotion" which Vesna Hadzivukovic mentioned might well have been "scary."

²⁷ *Hrvatska Odbrambene Snage*. The Croatian Defense Force.

²⁸ Reading this, Jacob Dickinson writes incredulously: "They believed this AND that presumably better fed & armed Afghans constituted an elite?"

²⁹ Needless to say, the other two sides do not accept this figure.

³⁰ When a much abbreviated version of this chapter was published in *SPIN* magazine, one Val Rodriguez from Signal Hill, California wrote in, saying (21 November 1994): "The Muslim SS Division referred to... was the 13th Waffen *Hanjar* that killed thousands of

Americans of the 5th U.S. Army divisions in Italy. They were later returned and sent to escort Yugoslav prisoners to Auschwitz." I am told that *hanjar* is an Arabic word meaning "to slit the throat."

³¹ But then, as Dickinson reminds me, I do.

³² Thank you.

³³ Op. cit., p. 7 (ch. IV).

³⁴ Every side knew what typified the others, as in my Muslim militiaman acquaintance's sneer: "Typically Serb!"

³⁵ A good example is the infamous *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.

³⁶ Croats and Muslims would be surprised to learn this.

³⁷ Pan-Slavism seems to be a reflex of this region in wartime. Even Stalin invoked it. "I was always alien to any Panslavic feelings," wrote Djilas after Yugoslavia's break with Stalin, "nor did I look upon Moscow's Panslavic ideas as anything but a maneuver for mobilizing conservative forces against the German invasion. But this emotion of mine [upon arriving in Russia] was something quite different and deeper, going even beyond the limits of my adherence to Communism" (*Conversations with Stalin*, p. 21).

³⁸ Former Yugoslavian Army.

³⁹ For a moral discussion of this situation, see above, "Defense of War Aims."

⁴⁰ In a book written back in the days of peace, before the dust had completely settled, so to speak, on Tito's grave, a well-intentioned academic wrote: "In July [1984] a young Bosnian lecturer, Vojislav Seselj, was sentenced in Sarajevo to eight years for 'endangering the social order' by his writings. The savagery of this sentence was denounced... and a Montenegrin member of the Federal Council resigned his seat in protest."—Singleton, p. 281. There is an eerie concordance between this incident and the repression suffered by Sesejl's opposite number in Croatia, the HSP leader, Dobroslav Paraga (interviewed in this essay, below). As Paraga noted, even "the American Senate passed a resolution in my favor." (The sponsor of this resolution, the Hon. James Trafficant, appears peripherally in my profile of James "Bo" Gritz. See below, "Off the Grid.")

Juridicists take note: violence may well beget violence, and repressing an ideologue is like sowing dragon's teeth.

⁴¹ The pistol that he drew was the same model that his happy longhaired Chetnik buddies were carrying when they showed up later: the 7.62 mm Model 57, a Yugoslavian 9 + 1-round version of the 8 + 1-round Soviet Tokarev. (For my handgun-less readers, I should explain that the "plus one" refers to a pistol's capacity for carrying an extra cartridge in the chamber in addition to a full magazine. This option may allow an accidental discharge.) Everybody with any experience of this gun always sang its praises to me. While I did not have an opportunity to fire one myself, I was able to handle several. The weight and heft were very (as Americans would say) "ergonomic."

⁴² In his autobiography, Trotsky remarked that "historical law is realized through the natural selection of accidents. On this foundation, there develops that conscious human activity which subjects accidents to a process of natural selection" (p. 477). This is as good as explanation as any of what happened to Vineta and what she became.

⁴³ I am glad that I was not the government. In the Frankfurt edition of the *International Herald-Tribune*, Saturday-Sunday, April 16-17, 1994, I read the following edifying statements ("Serbs Troops Surge into Gorazde as Defenses Fall," p. 1): "A well-placed American official said the UN commander, Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, had declared the situation 'untenable,' and said it was too late for U.S. bombing raids to try to deter the Bosnian Serbs," and another "American official" was quoted as saying: "We are now trying to figure out what we should be trying to do."

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General*, p. 4, para. 11.

⁴⁵ "Duty offers a welcome way to escape the sense of responsibility that might be awakened by compassion," a psychologist wrote. "... People obsessed by the concept of duty are even prepared to die by faithfully performing it—and they think that by rendering allegiance to an abstract idea they are displaying responsibility."—Gruen, p. 31.

⁴⁶ Cf. West, pp. 82-83, 132-35, 210-216.

⁴⁷ Glenny, p. 195.

⁴⁸ According to one historian, "The Ustasa movement stood for extreme Croatianism, extreme anti-Serbianism, extreme anti-Yugoslavianism, and anti-democratism. Its anti-Serbianism was a continuation of an ideological strain that developed in Croatia in the early 1890's under the leadership of Dr. Josip Frank, a Zagreb lawyer of German Jewish ancestry who was head of an offshoot of the Party of Rights, which had been established some thirty years earlier by Dr. Ante Starcevic" (Tomasevich, p. 105).

⁴⁹ "[Alexander's] assassin was a member of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, but the action was organized by the Croatian terrorist organization Ustasa, led by Dr. Ante Pavelic, which operated from bases in Italy and Hungary."—Ibid, p. 10. Pavelic was an HSP leader. For more on him, see the "Primitives" section below. See also Annex G, "Summary of Ethnic Relations in Yugoslavia During World War II."

⁵⁰ Paraga said the same thing to me: "HOS was formed before the Cro Army was formed. They answered the call of the nation to help the nation, and had a great influence on the Croatian Army. This bothered Mr. Tadjman because he worried that HOS's influence would increase my influence."

⁵¹ Probably with good reason. A black market organizer in Zagreb told me in 1992, when HOS was at its peak: "There's not a big market for weapons in Zagreb right now. One guy from HOS will sell a pistol or two. The going price is five hundred deutschemarks. Last year, pistols went for a thousand or fifteen hundred. Most people have to import guns now, or else go to Bosnia, hope to capture a Serbian barracks. You know, the war in Bosnia is not organized as it should be. When they capture a barracks, they don't write it down. People accuse HOS of getting arms and selling them. By law, they should have turned them in to Croatian authorities."—Serbian and Muslim irregular militias, of course, were doing the same.

⁵² Starcevic, founder of HSP, was "strongly national Croatian."—Kann, p. 447, accord-

ing to whom, Starcevic was less extreme than Josip Frank, who founded the Party of Pure Right [as opposed to the Party of Right], which was “above all anti-Serb. Neither of them could deliver the goods of a tribalistic program which would have given the Southern Slavs under Croatian leadership equal constitutional status with Austria and Hungary” (loc. cit.). Cf. also West, pp. 18-19.

⁵³ Glenny, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Tito’s biographer says, “The two men needed each other to stay in power, and were in fact quite close political friends” (West, p. 357).

⁵⁵ Kraljevic’s car was stopped and machine-gunned by HVO soldiers.

⁵⁶ Djilas admits that Goli Otok (“Bare Island”), established under Tito in 1948, was “organized without a legal basis” (*Rise and Fall*, p. 235). “On his passage to the island the prisoner was shoved—in fact, hurled—to the bottom of the boat. Then, when he emerged on Goli Otok, he had to run the gauntlet. This was a double line of inmates, who vied with one another in hitting him. If gouged eyes were a rarity, broken teeth and ribs were not. There were also incorrigibles, who were subjected to lynching, sometimes spontaneous, sometimes not” (p. 241). Djilas believes that conditions were ameliorated shortly thereafter. Unlike Paraga, who probably knows better, he states that the camp might have continued to the time of his writing (the mid-1980s).

⁵⁷ Bosnia i Hercegovina.

⁵⁸ Spanish battalion.

⁵⁹ In East Mostar they prepared a diagram of the “accident” for the benefit of the US Consul. I was not permitted to copy the diagram, but it was not dissimilar from the one in Harber, p. 66: “Trip-Wire Fuze Emplacement of Vertical Penetration Mine”—with this exception: in Harber’s book only one mine is shown. The diagram in East Mostar showed at least two mines, and possibly three. The first mine was designed to blow out a tire and make the car careen into the second mine. I remember no such sensation.

⁶⁰ “God,” or “go with God.” Croatian greeting and farewell.

⁶¹ In January 2001, Biljana Plavsic flew voluntarily to the Hague to face an indictment for genocide.

⁶² Three years after this conversation, I read in an excerpt from Michael Ignatieff’s essay on war crimes trials the following words: “The result of five years of war is that a shared truth is now inconceivable. In the conditions of ethnic separation and authoritarian populism prevailing in all of the republics of the former Yugoslavia, a shared truth—and hence a path from truth to reconciliation—is barred, not just by hatreds but by institutions too undemocratic to allow countervailing truths to circulate” (*Harper’s Magazine*, vol. 294, no. 1762, March 1997, p. 16).

⁶³ King Alexander, who was a Serb. The assassination was Pavelic’s bodyguard. For an account of Pavelic’s leading role in the murder, see Havens et al, pp. 89-90.

⁶⁴ This figure is probably low. Most other estimates I’ve seen claim that between half a million and 750,000 Serbs were murdered. Some sources push the figure to over a million.

⁶⁵ Walters, p. 292.

⁶⁶ Pavelic died peacefully abroad in 1959, of old age. For details on Pavelic’s escape from Yugoslavia, and the possible connivance of the Allies, see West, pp. 204-207.

⁶⁷ Thinking about Ms. Plavsic’s stance again half a year later, I want to add the following: It is easy and natural to say that if I were constructing my ideal city from nothing I’d people it with souls like mine, because they would be less likely to quarrel—and souls like mine would probably come from my own “background”—which could mean “class,” as it did for the Marxists, or “race,” as it did for the Fascists, or “lineage,” as it does to ex-Yugoslavs.

⁶⁸ Adnan was very moral. When Yugoslavia was Communist, he’d been a conscientious objector. They told him: You are like a child, too emotional. —But they let him off.

⁶⁹ It is so sad that Vineta and Francis never met, because they might have liked each other. It was interesting that Francis could believe in any atrocity committed by Serbs, immediately crying with Adnan, “How primitive!”, but when I showed him Vineta’s

letter his first response was: "Well, that's probably what they tell them to keep them pumped up and angry. But did she actually see with her own eyes that her boyfriend had been cut up into pieces?"

⁷⁰ Three years afterward, in *The State of War and Peace Atlas* (p. 34, map 10), I found in a map of ethnic cleansing in ex-Yugoslavia a symbol indicating a reported mass grave near Mostar ("over 100 corpses"). Polce was not listed, but Dretelj and Gabelar were each indicated as being the site of a concentration camp. Unfortunately, the dates and provenances of these camps were not supplied.

⁷¹ Ms. Plavsic told me that she once permitted a BBC crew to search for concentration camps using a list provided by the Red Cross—Konjic, Bradina, Celebic, Tarcin—and they couldn't find a single one. "I can say for example from May to the end of '92 the situation was Muslims and Croats together in all aspects—soldier collusion. Those camps were ruled from Muslims and Croats together. When they entered in some village, some small town, they massacred those people, and immediately they took a photo and showed that those people, those poor people, were Muslims. That was the method. Here in Belgrade one lady recognized her father on TV and he was supposedly a Muslim in a concentration camp."

⁷² See Introduction, above.

⁷³ The Germans put some prisoners into Polish uniforms, gave them injections to keep them still, then shot their corpses and exhibited them as proof of a Polish attack upon the German radio station at Gleiwitz. For a more detailed account, see Watt, pp. 485-86, 532-33.

⁷⁴ In 1939, the future Chetnik leader, Draza Mihailovic, was punished with thirty days' arrest for making the same proposal to his army superiors.

⁷⁵ It is statements such as this which convince me that the bad feeling between the three groups in ex-Yugoslavia was so intractable because the issue was not only defense of ethnicity, which motivated ethnic cleansing, but also defense of ground, which made the objects of ethnic cleansing all the more stub-

bornly determined to stay put. In his book on Muslim-Hindu violence in India, Sudhir Kakar writes (op. cit., p. 49) that "national identities can be based on several defining principles of collective belonging: territory (e.g., Switzerland), ethnicity (e.g., Japan), religion (e.g., Pakistan), and ideology (e.g., the United States)." Thus Kakar sees defense of ground, of a "sacred geography" as an integral cause of riots in India, whereas "the notions of ethnicity in Germany or religion in Iran evoke greater political passions than territory" (loc. cit.). American and western European observers may well have failed to apply this distinction in ex-Yugoslavia.

⁷⁶ Field Marshall von Moltke once wrote: "I also believe that in all countries the largest majority of the population desires peace. Nevertheless, the people do not decide, but the parties they have placed in control" (op. cit., p. 25). Both of these propositions may be true at the beginning of a long war fought on home soil, but perhaps neither is at the end.

THE AVENGERS OF KOSOVO

¹ Rebecca West, p. 841.

² I say *Kosovo* because that's how it's spelled in most of the books I've read. (West spells it *Kosovo* to indicate pronunciation.) Maybe I should say *Kosova* when I'm speaking with Albanians, but it would feel hypocritical. I refuse to say "Serbian" or "Croatian" or "Bosnian" instead of the old "Serbo-Croatian." Let one word do.

³ Which is to say graft, sex scandals and atomized murder.

⁴ For example: Kosovo represented a nationalist wedge hammered into the flesh of Yugoslavia in 1989. Exactly six hundred years earlier, Kosovo was a wedding ring which married all Serbs to each other, sanctifying them with their own blood. And now what? I suppose that six hundred years hence, Kosovo will divide people and unite them in some new shimmer of terrible glory.

⁵ Between 1992 and 1997, the average annual consumer price inflation in Serbia was 147.6 percent—among the highest in the

world. The US inflation rate for 1990 through 1997 was 3.3 percent. From *The Economist Pocket World in Figures*, 1999 (7th ed. (London: Profile Books Ltd., 1998), pp. 34-35, tables "Highest inflation, 1990-97" and "Lowest inflation, 1990-97."

⁶ Figures from my prewar atlas, which also lists the areas of Yugoslav provinces. To calculate the area of postwar Yugoslavia I added the areas of Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia includes the autonomous regions of Vojvodina (8,000 square miles) and Kosovo (4,000 square miles). The remainder of Serbia is 22,000 square miles. Montenegro is 5,000 square miles. Of Bosnia's nearly 20,000 square miles, a considerable portion now comprises the Bosnian Serbian Republic; however, this "entity" (as the US Department of State quaintly calls it) is not part of the rump Yugoslavia; nor are the Republika Srpska and Yugoslavia along on friendly terms.

⁷ An American in Beograd in 1998 could expect any number of such encounters. On the Knez Mihailovna promenade, for instance, there was a man selling buttons such as KISS ME I'M SERBIAN with an immense tongue sticking out of a mouth, and various buttons about sex, and then NATO GO HOME and then smiling-faced buttons and then FUCK THE USA. I bought a button which said in Serbo-Croatian IT'S NOT SERBIAN TO KEEP SILENT. It was an opposition button, actually, directed against President Milosevic. The man thanked me and said: Which country you from? —The USA, I said, pointing to the FUCK THE USA button with a cheery smile. The crowd recoiled, and the vendor said: So, you come to bomb us today? —Not today, I said. —Oh, tomorrow, then. —It won't be me, I insisted, but from the crowd a girl was already shouting: *FBI!* —FBI or CIA? the button-vendor speculated aloud, bringing his face menacingly forward. —I just can't decide, I said. Which one do you think is better? —Whoever pays you more *money*, the man sneered. He stood there easily among the mob, whose astonishment at my presence among them was rapidly turning to hostility, and said: *Many, many Americans here in*

Beograd. Many American *Marines*. —Oh, is that right? I said. I haven't seen any. I arrived only last night. —The girl who'd called me FBI shouted: So when do you *leave* Beograd?

⁸ When I repeated this aphorism to Albanian Kosovars, many were shocked. My Albanian translator Arguriana, for example, naively believed that Beograd Serbs didn't care about Kosovo one way or the other. And naiveté was bliss; easier that way not to face up to the bloodshed lurking in the future! For their own part, the Albanian politicians who had shaped the girl could not bear to admit that Serbs felt as passionately about the issue as they. Arguriana said that people such as Misa must be "crazy"—denial's most convenient label for whatever it rejects.

⁹ According to several of its inhabitants, Priluzje is the largest Serbian village in Kosovo.

¹⁰ Priluzje's school teacher estimated that the town was now ninety-seven percent Serbian, the remainder being gypsies.

¹¹ A notorious Serbian irregular leader widely considered to be a war criminal.

¹² In Albanian, UÇK.

¹³ Vineta had referred me to her. Those two women had "professionally correct" relations. "Oh, she's not so bad, given what she is," Vineta would say wearily. About Vineta Arguriana never said anything. It always made me sad to see the two of them together, which of course happened only in Pristina.

¹⁴ It's possible that Vineta might have known them. Producer and translator, she'd rubbed shoulders with many such over the years of Yugoslavia's agony. I didn't want to ask her.

¹⁵ His declaration of fear and isolation was echoed by everyone whom I interviewed in Priluzje. The first time I met the police chief of Priluzje, he sat down with us at the school-teacher's kitchen table and said: "Half an hour ago, there were at least thirty Albanians who came here to get gas. They got no dirty looks, nothing. All of them had those white caps—an obvious sign of their nationality. No one can even think of going around here with a Serb cap," he added so bitterly. And I remember, for instance, the pretty blonde storekeeper who said: "When we came back from our

vacation and the kids saw the police, they thought we'd been attacked by Albanians. They're so afraid. And then when they get a little older, there's no cultural activity, no discothèque, nothing. When the youth want to go out, they can't. They can't learn sports or language outside the village. The biggest threat is kidnapping. Terrorists pay five thousand deutschmarks to kidnap someone from a village."—Indeed, as Petar and I were talking with her, Zoran Kostic, the town president, announced that he'd heard in the market just now of an Albanian plan to do just that to him. ("Is it true that you've offered a reward to kidnap him?" I asked the Glavotina people, who'd been just then denouncing him as a war criminal. They scornfully replied: "If we wanted to, we could take him in ten minutes, without any money!")

¹⁶ Moreover, unscathed though their village might be, the Priluzje people remained cut off from their farmlands and ancestral graves across the bridge. President Kostic claimed that one of the two Serbian Orthodox cemeteries behind the river had been destroyed. Some Albanians from Glavotina had used the tombstones to build a barn. —"If you dare to go to Glavotina you will see it, he told me."—Of course I saw nothing of the kind, which means either that the gruesome barn never existed or else that the Glavotina people didn't want to show it to me. What they called "the front line" was the row of house-hulks farthest down the hillside, with an unobstructed view of Priluzje. This is where the Priluzje people said that their bunkers were; the doctor had also pointed to that place to indicate the hypothetical barn built of grave-stones. My guides in Glavotina warned (just like the children and gypsies down in Priluzje who pointed at the bridge): "It's too dangerous to go there." —"You saw this barn?" I asked the doctor, and he looked at me for a long while and said yes. —"How were you feeling?" —"I can't describe how I was feeling," he said. The horror of such a desecration may well strike even deeper than the Serbian psyche than into our own. "And that's another difference between Serbs and Americans," the doctor once remarked. "We have a church.

You only have something that looks like a church." That point of course is rather arguable, but the land-rootedness of most Yugoslavs would make of the vandalism of a cemetery not merely sacrilege against the church, but also against one's ancestral ground. —The Glavotina people flew into a rage when I raised that question, shouting: "That's a stupid lie! They go by tanks to *their* graves." —"Why do they do that?" I inquired. —"We don't know. Because they're crazy."

¹⁷ Not headquarters for the district, I believe, but only for the town. According to the police chief of Priluzje, the main base of the KLA was in Zilivoda, ten kilometers away. When I asked the KLA where their main base was, they wouldn't say.

¹⁸ It was typical of political passion's numerical honesty that a stocky Albanian coal miner I met in Pristina insisted: "In twenty years, all problems between humans, just one Serb was killed!" ("*That* was cool!" exclaimed Vineta later in sarcastic amazement.) —"What about the two Serbian policemen who got murdered the other day?" I inquired. —"Where? I don't know about that." —"And how many Albanians have the Serbs killed?" I asked as Vineta dug her fingernails into her palms. —The coal miner laughed. —"You know how many." —But I didn't. No one does. "In your opinion," I asked the sculptor Çavardasha, "how many Kosovar Serbs have been killed by Kosovar Albanians since Tito's death, and vice versa?" —"I can't say. I really can't say." —"Well, would you be uncomfortable saying that dozens of Serbs have died, and thousands of Albanians? Hundreds of each?" —"I don't want to make a mistake. I cannot say. But in this last clash, they say eighteen hundred Albanians were killed, twenty percent of them women and another twenty percent children..." —And here is the estimate of a Belgrade Serb who regularly travels to Kosovo with foreign journalists: "Since autumn 1997, a thousand people have died—I'm talking civilians. That includes 150 Serb civilians and more than 100 police. But out of those 800 Muslims remaining, I believe most were shooting at the police. And they themselves kill

Albanian 'collaborators' —Serbian-speaking Muslims..."

¹⁹ The Albanian coal miner I'd met in Pristina insisted: "The police burn *all* houses, no difference if from them shooting or not."

²⁰ Nobody could spell his name with any certainty, so this is my best orthographic guess. Other possibilities: Amroosh Aslani/Ashlani/A'clani, etc.

²¹ Stories of beatings were widespread. Arguriana had told me that the worst experience she'd had was of Serbian police examining her identity card, then threatening to beat her based on her nationality, but not actually beating her. But then there was the Albanian I met in a cafe in Pristina who upon emerging from the cinema with his friend had been met by two Serbian civilians who'd demanded to see his papers. He ran away. They beat his friend and robbed him of his money. And then there was the wide-eyed Albanian boy with the pale narrow face; his father while driving alone back from Obilic was attacked by a mob of Serbian civilians, one of whom said: Let's attack this Albanian! and only the Serbian police saved him. That had happened only three months previously, during some of the worst violence in Kosovo. I asked the boy if Albanians ever committed similar acts against Serbs, and he said: Before, no. Now it might be true that we do something to them.

²² Thus the Serbian director of the media center in Pristina.

²³ "The ultimate origin of the Albanians remains a mystery," runs my 1974 *Britannica*; "they are generally considered to be descendants of the ancient Ilyrians (Albanoi) and thus members of the Indo-European race..." (vol. 1, p. 419, article on Albania). "First Albanian was here in Kosovo," Arguriana insisted, showing her accustomed talent for reducing ideology to its lowest denominator. "Then Serb was here."—"When did they come?"—"I don't know."—As for Vineta, she asserted that the Albanians' ancestors were brought to the region to groom the horses of Alexander the Great.

²⁴ When I went to Albania I asked this question of all the KLA cadres I found. They often

proved to be surprisingly prosperous young men in leather jackets, who sat in expensive cafes drinking coffee, smoke wandering upward with many vacillations. They had relatives in western Europe or America who sent them money. A few were volunteers from Albania. Then there were the grim old men in woolen jackets who'd spent decades hating, and the many wounded, the shell-shocked, the family men turned refugees, the transients. One of the young ones, who'd actually deserted, having gotten fed up with KLA in-fighting, responded to my stock question *Would you marry a Serbian girl* with a brutal laughing shout: "I'd kill her!"—Another man, who'd led his family over the border once the Serbs had razed his house (he said they destroyed KLA and civilian homes alike) said that if Kosovo gained independence the Serbs could stay but he would not have any Serbian friends. An old man in a blue beret shouted: "I'm all angry about Serbia. Serbia has suppressed Kosova! They have always discriminated against us. They have taken our land."—"They even whipped us!" interjected a man in a black beret. "When they deal with us, they only use guns and knife. They always refer to us as terrorists, but *they* are the terrorists. They have killed ten persons in my family. They went to their houses to look for guns. And they found no guns, but they killed them."—"Women and children?" I asked.—"Only men."—He too had little use for Serbs.

²⁵ This was eerily similar to the pronouncement of the Albanian money-changer I met in a cafe in Pristina. —Kosovo's not important for Serbia, he said. It's nothing to do with Jerusalem. It's nothing to do with it. It's gold and wealth, oil in the ground.

²⁶ For a long time he could not believe that I as a journalist was not in the pay of the American government. When I told him that I agreed with some of my government's policies and disagreed with others, he was astounded. I hope that in the end he finally trusted that I was in fact my own person, not a hireling or a spy, but who knows what he really thought of me? And yet he always treated me with kindness.

²⁷ The police chief of Priluzje did tell me: "A couple of days ago, some old Albanians came here to shop. I invited them to have coffee in my office and made them feel safe. And I said: I can guarantee your safety. Therefore, can you guarantee mine? They shrugged and said: Not really."

²⁸ Ibrahim Rugova was the leader of the Albanian shadow government in Kosovo. I attended one of his press conferences, which was very brief. He took one question; he read a prepared speech; he denounced splinter elements in the KLA who were taking Albanian leaders hostage; he smiled; he said: "There is no reason for Serbs to fear a possible Kosovo action. They should not listen to the Serb extremists. All Serb interests will be safeguarded." —"At least they say hello to me," said the red-haired Serbian woman in the media center. —"When I call Dimaqi, as soon as they hear me speaking Serbian, they hang up on me." —Rugova was "the Balkan Gandhi," they said; Dimaqi was "the Balkan Mandela" because he had served more than twenty years in Serbian prisons. Old, white-haired, conservative-looking, beaming down at his documents, his head turning from side to side, Dimaqi seemed a mild, gentle man with a slight double chin, his pale hands almost touching as he read, with the white pen between them. He said to me: "We waited, and we tried to find a solution. But Serbs made so much crimes and many things against Albanians. Now it is difficult to live together. This conflict is not against Serbians as people. This conflict is against the Serbian regime. But Albanians are ready to live in friendship with Serbs in Kosovo." —Meanwhile, Petar, who had been hoping to meet Dimaqi, learn from him, and get his photograph taken beside the important man, was literally left standing out in the cold, as was Vineta. The conference room was warm and spacious; there would have been room for my friends. —"Well, I grant he's not a politician," said an Albanian Kosovar whom I met in Tirana. "After twenty-seven years in prison you can't expect him not to hate Serbs."

²⁹ The doctor neglects to mention that Albania had been annexed by Italy. Here is

what a history book says about southern Yugoslavia during World War II: "In Kosovo, occupied by Italy's Albanian puppet, no attempt was made to reorient national and ethnic relationships. The administration was theoretically Albanian, and this theoretically improved the status of the Albanians vis à vis the formerly dominant Serbs. On the other hand, all important posts in the civilian government were held by Italians... [who] considered both Serbs and Albanians as at best culturally backward and at worst subhumans. Their rule was correspondingly unpopular." —E. Garrison Walters, p. 293.

³⁰ In one chart which indexes Yugoslavia's average national income per capita at a value of 100, Kosovo remains at the absolute bottom from 1947, when the chart begins (index of a mere 52.6) to 1978, when it ends (and the index has declined to 26.8!). During the same period, Serbia approaches but does not quite reach the average value (Singleton, p. 270, Table 8).

³¹ Media Center Belgrade, *Political Guide to Yugoslavia and Address List* (Belgrade: Press documents, no. 6, 1997), p. 101.

² The Serbian doctor in Priluzje asserted that those taxes amounted to thirty percent of Albanians' income and that Rugova's government resembled the Mafia. "They *have* to attack us, since otherwise they would get accused by their followers of taking their taxes for nothing!" —But an Albanian in Pristina said that he paid only three percent and that he was sure Rugova used the money well.

³³ "Are terrorists and KLA the same?" I had asked Priluzje's President Kostic. —"No difference. KLA are terrorists, but nobody accuses them as KLA. They hide behind that name. Here in Kosovo it's not a war but terrorist activities. Terrorism was all over Bosnia during the civil war, so no wonder it came here."

³⁴ Singleton (pp. 272-273) blames in equal proportion residual Serbian privilege, the slow economic development of the region, and Albanian militancy.

³⁵ The burned houses and corn alone constitute evidence of atrocities committed against Albanian civilians by Serbian police. But this fact ought not to prevent us from sympathiz-

ing with ordinary cops who are simply trying to do their jobs under more and more dangerous conditions. The two murdered policemen, for instance, were merely attempting to deliver supplies to the police station in Malisevo. Here is how the police chief of Priluzje describes the changes in his routine: "It all started ten years ago between the two villages. Glavotina was a Serb village. Even the name is a Serbian word meaning Big Peaks. Under pressure, Serbs were gradually leaving the village for places like Priluzje. One or two years ago, I was still free to go to Glavotina as an authorized person. I felt quite safe going across the bridge. Now, as an authorized person, commander for six years, I don't feel safe anymore crossing that bridge. My patrol route has gotten shorter and shorter." —"How did you notice that you were becoming less safe?" I asked. —"I could see it. I knew every single face. They were ignoring me and didn't want to give us details. They were very reserved. I didn't feel safe anymore. When the clashes in Kosovo started this year, we had shooting every night. This has been less frequent for about a week now, although one guy who went toward Glavotina to go fishing or something was attacked from the back and got five bullets." (This was probably the farmer who got two bullet wounds in his arm. His story appears below.) —"What do you think about the Milosevic-Holbrooke Agreement?" I asked him. —"After the biggest clashes, I put ten or eleven guys under arrest for terrorist anti-State activities. Now with the agreement I had to let them go." —Arguriana, needless to say, saw the Milosevic-Holbrooke Agreement differently. —"This place, this empty place, the police used to beat the people," said the Albanian girl. "But now since one month ago, the police go away. And the people start to come back." We drove a little farther and she said: "There were a lot of policemen here. But they only pretend to go away. At night, when the journalists go, their snipers shoot at the people from that ferro-nickel factory." We drove five minutes more, and she said: "All these houses, burned from inside. You see that house without a roof? Three months ago

there were tanks in there. This was the front line. Between KLA and Serbs. But now they are gone. The Serbs only shoot in the night, to intimidate." —"Serbian police, or others?" I asked. —"Police."

³⁶ "Tudjman and Izetbegovic are both good," Arguriana said to me once. Both fight for freedom—by which I assume that she meant: *Both fight against Serbia*. —Vineta said wearily: "I don't even care anymore." And, speaking of the Croatian leader, we might quote the doctor in Priluzje, who when I asked who were the snipers in Glavotina replied: "It's all peasants who live in those villages. There were a few instructors from Croatia who were training them."

³⁷ Some sources say that he fell in battle.

³⁸ A long extract appears in Rebecca West, pp. 910-911. "The legends of Kosovo helped to keep alive for centuries the spark of a Serbian national consciousness..." (Singleton, p. 47). The Serbian nationalist who assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, thereby triggering World War I, chose the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo to do his deed.

³⁹ Rebecca West quotes a Serb as telling her in 1937: "These are the famous poppies of Kossovo that grow nowhere else, but are supposed to have sprung from the blood of the slaughtered Serbs. Later the whole plain is red with them..." (p. 901).

⁴⁰ No matter what he might have done in folk legends, he did not save Europe, or Serbia. "The battle of Kosovo sounded the death knell for independent Serbia," opines Singleton, p. 27).

⁴¹ Ivan Mestrovic, 1912-13. The English translation was actually given as "To the Revengers of Kosovo."

INTRODUCTION: AFRICA

¹ This phrase gets used in an ironically similar context by a U.S. Marine in "Let Me Know If You're Scared," below.

² See above, "Supplicants: Beggars in Madagascar, 1994."

THE JEALOUS ONES

¹ In September 1994, \$1 U.S. was equivalent to about 3,600 Fmg (or 4,000 Fmg on the black market). "Malagasy," by the way, is pronounced the same way it is spelled by the more rational French: "Malagache."

² Any talk of national character is considered suspect these days because the line between typologizing and stereotyping is so debatably thin. I don't care. The fact is that Malagasy do think differently from, say, Swedes. In her famous *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict makes the argument that people labeled deviant or even psychotic by one culture might fit happily into another's norm. Many of the Malagasy I describe in this essay might be considered scheming cut-throats by Americans. They for their part would consider many Americans to be repressed equivocators. And which country has a more violent and criminal ambiance? I'd have to call it a draw.

³ Here, by the way, is what one of her letters (28 October 1993) has to say about organized crime: "Well, formerly I promised to give you some suggestions about stories which can be very helpful as to your coming over here. I've been thinking deeply about it and now I'm sending you some interesting stories: Madagascar is not living in peace at all for the present moment. Indeed, everywhere people keep on killing one another using up to date guns. For example, in Mahajanga, they shot one another in broad daylight and many people were died and some were dangerously wounded. In the little village which is called Ambatondrazaka, from where rice are spread all over Madagascar, there were an attack of Mafia and also many people were killed. Rumours tell us that there are top ranking men of the state supply weapons to the students of university in order to crush the new government and to stand the old one. So, every day, something like that happen in Madagascar and I am sure that if you happen to come around you will be satisfied because those Mafia people killed with such a wanton cruelty, they don't have any compunction to kill man and woman, children alike." (By the

way, in the unpleasant "you will be satisfied" I detect the personality of the hired letter-writer Jaquelin.)

⁴ Pronounced "pangerpoose."

⁵ Around US \$14.00 in 1994.

⁶ I am reminded of Queen Nitocris's defense of authority and tranquility. She commands that a bridge be built across the Euphrates, which divides Babylon in half. "Between the piers of the bridge she had squared baulks of timber laid down for the inhabitants to cross by but only during daylight, for every night the timber was removed to prevent people from going over in the dark and robbing each other" (Herodotus, Book One, p. 116). That such a measure would be thought necessary (and plausible by the not entirely credulous Herodotus) is an indication of weak governing power and weaker social cohesion, which hurts everyone.

⁷ Short for Antananarivo.

⁸ Deanna Swaney and Robert Wilcox, *Madagascar and Comoros: A Travel Survival Kit*, 2nd. ed (Berkeley, California: Lonely Planet Publications, 1994), pp. 26-27, 136.

⁹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, (New York: Penguin, 1967), p. 399.

¹⁰ Short for Antananarivo.

¹¹ Pronounced "Yoosh."

¹² In this regard it is interesting to quote a massive UN study which concludes that "a punitive orientation seems to prevail in the developing world as measured by sanctioning options for a recidivist burglar" (UNICRI, p. 76 [Zveckic and del Frate]). Why might this be? Well, when aggregate victimization rates (reported by respondents) were broken down by the UN, it was discovered that twice as many burglaries were committed in developing countries as in developed ones. The same went for robberies and for "sexual incidents." Personal theft was reported forty percent more often in developing countries. All of these, with the exception of the "sexual incidents," are highly relevant to O.'s perception of the "Mafia." Only in assaults and threats of assaults were the developed and the developing countries even (ibid, van Dijk and Zveckic, "General Report," p. 370, Figure 1). While Madagascar was not itself surveyed,

UNICRI noted that “burglaries from homes were reported most often from African cities...” (ibid, p. 372).

¹³ I heard from another driver that in a region somewhat to the north of this area there were Dahalo who’d impersonate customs officials late at night. If you stopped, they’d kill you and everybody in the car, then strip away the valuables.

¹⁴ This line of reasoning is common among “ethical” cattle rustlers the world over. One associate of Billy the Kid, for instance, Charlie Bowdre, “would never steal stock from a woman or from a little cattleman, although he was entirely willing to steal from some big cattleman. I have myself heard him justify such a course by the argument that the big men had too much, more than they could use in their natural lives. Why, then, should not a poor devil like himself get a little from them when in need?” (Klasner, p. 177).

¹⁵ Over a year later she was still writing me, very defensively, I thought: “I say you before I don’t believe this medicine Malagache.”

¹⁶ About seven dollars apiece.

¹⁷ When I was in Tamatave at the beginning of 1993, a pousse-pousse ride cost about a thousand Fmg. In 1994 it was more like one thousand five hundred. The pousse-pousse drivers had to pay about that every day for rent. They were also losing ground to motor-taxis. They were, in short, poor, dirty and desperate, so it is no wonder that some of them might have turned to crime.

¹⁸ As she or (her current paid letter-writer) put it so well in a letter almost two years later, “Now Darling you understand all problem in Madagascar all very expensive.”

SPECIAL TAX

¹ According to Willy Ronis of Reporters sans Frontières (*Pour la liberté de la presse*, Paris, 2001, p. 111, entry on Joseph Kabila, “predator upon the press”), “since 1997, more than 130 journalists have been arrested by one of the nine security services of the country and many of them have been tortured” (my trans.).

² The police claimed that before the outbreak of the civil war on August 6 1998, the exchange rate was thirty to one. I have not been able to verify this.

³ “This is very common in Africa,” said Mr. Franck. “For instance, I have seen a sorcerer burned in the market.”

⁴ “For Zaireans, if they want to make a transit into our country, our police sometimes take money even if there is no infraction.”—Roger Bouka-Owoko, communications officer, Observatoire Congolaise de Droits de l’Homme (OCDH), Brazzaville. In this individual’s opinion, and I concur, the police in Brazza were much less parasitic than those in Kinshasa. When I asked him whether ordinary citizens in Brazza feared the authorities, he replied, “No and yes. No, for honest people, they don’t care. But yes, because when somebody has made an infraction, the police arrest bystanders. They don’t know the difference.”

⁵ Kinshasa by night: White T-shirts and fires in the dirty brownish darkness, dimly seen walls, the glowing braziers of the brochette stands, coils of concertina wire, silver in a rare taxi’s headlights; potholes, garbage, desperately predatory soldiers, street children crouching around fires; loud singing from the Pentecostal churches, whores who accosted you often enough to remember you, running up to smile at you with their red-greased lips...

⁶ Or, to be precise, the Mission de l’Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, abbreviated MONUC. I often amused myself by donning a stupid look and asking to speak with Mademoiselle Monique.

⁷ Perhaps I should not have been surprised when *Men’s Journal* rejected this essay.

⁸ Actually, the ANC, the Armée Nationale Congolaise. The government forces were known as the FAC, the Forces Armée Congolaise.