CHAPTER 1

Almost ninety years ago during the Sutton-Taylor feud, John Wesley Hardin drilled a half-dozen .44 pistol balls into one of the wood columns on my front porch. My grandfather, Old Hack, lived in the house then, and he used to describe how Wes Hardin had ridden drunk all night from San Antonio when he had heard that Hack had promised to lock him in jail if he ever came back into DeWitt County again. The sun had just risen, and it was raining slightly when Hardin rode into the yard, his black suit streaked with mud, horse sweat, and whiskey; he had a shotgun tied across his saddle horn with a strip of leather and his navy Colt was already cocked in his hand.

"You, Hack! Get out here. And don't bring none of your Lincoln niggers with you or I'll kill them, too."

(My grandfather was sheriff and justice of the peace, and the Reconstruction government had forced him to take on two Negro federal soldiers as deputies. Of the forty-two men that Hardin eventually killed, many were Negroes,

whom he hated as much as he did carpetbaggers and law officers.)

Hardin began shooting at the front porch, cocking and firing while the horse reared and pitched sideways with each explosion in its ears. Wes's face was red with whiskey, his eyes were dilated, and when the horse whirled in a circle he whipped the pistol down between its ears. He emptied the rest of the chambers, the fire and black powder smoke roaring from the barrel, and all six shots hit the wood column in a neat vertical line.

Hack had been up early that morning with one of his mares that was in foal, and when he saw Wes Hardin through the barn window he took the Winchester from the leather saddle scabbard nailed against the wall and waited for Wes to empty his pistol. Then he stepped out into the lot, his cotton nightshirt tucked inside his trousers, blood and membrane on his hands and forearms, and pumped a shell into the chamber. Wes jerked around backward in the saddle when he heard the action work behind him.

"You goddamn sonofabitch," Hack said. "Start to untie that shotgun and I'll put a new asshole in the middle of your face."

Hardin laid his pistol against his thigh and turned his horse in a half circle.

"You come up behind me, do you?" he said. "Get your pistol and let me reload and I'll pay them nigger deputies for burying you."

"I told you not to come back to DeWitt. Now you shot up my house and probably run off half my Mexicans. I'm going to put you in jail and wrap chains all over you, then

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I'm taking you into my court for attempted assault on a law officer. Move off that horse."

Wes looked steadily at Hack, his killer's eyes intent and frozen as though he were staring into a flame. Then he brought his boots out of the stirrups, slashed his spurs into the horse's sides, and bent low over the neck with his fingers in the mane as the horse charged toward the front gate. But Hack leaped forward at the same time and swung the Winchester barrel down with both hands on Hardin's head and knocked him sideways out of the saddle into the mud. There was a three-inch split in his scalp at the base of the hairline, and when he tried to raise himself to his feet, Hack kicked him squarely in the face twice with his boot heel. Then he put him in the back of a vegetable wagon, locked his wrists in manacles, tied trace chains around his body, and nailed the end links to the floorboards.

And that's how John Wesley Hardin went to jail in DeWitt County, Texas. He never came back to fight Hack again, and no other law officer ever got the better of him, except John Selman, who drove a pistol ball through his eye in an El Paso saloon in 1895.

As I stood there on my front porch that hot, breathless July day, leaning against the column with the six bullet holes, now worn and smooth, I could see Hack's whitewashed marker under the pin oaks in the Holland family cemetery. The trees were still in the heat, the leaves filmed with dust, and the shade was dappled on the headstones. Four generations of my family were buried there: Son Holland, a Tennessee mountain man from the Cumberlands who came to Texas in 1835 and fought at the battle of San Jacinto for

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Texas's independence, was a friend of Sam Houston, later received twelve hundred acres from the Texas Republic, and died of old age while impressing horses for the Confederacy; Hack's two older brothers, who rode with the Texas cavalry under General Hood at the battle of Atlanta; Great Uncle Tip, who made the first drive up the Chisholm Trail and married an Indian squaw; Sidney, a Baptist preacher and alcoholic, who always carried two revolvers and a derringer and killed six men; Winfro, murdered in a brothel during the Sutton-Taylor feud, his body dragged on a rope back and forth in front of the house by drunken cowboys; Jefferson, who had two years' business college in Austin and decided to compete with the King and XIT ranches in the cattle market and lost six hundred acres of Holland land as a result; and Sam, my father—Hackberry's son—a genteel man with a rheumatic heart, a onetime southern historian at the University of Texas and later a United States congressman during the New Deal, and finally a suicide.

Out beyond the cemetery the green hills sloped down toward the river, which was now low and brown, and the crests were covered with blackjack, live oak, and mesquite. The cotton in the fields was in bloom, the rows evenly spaced and stretched out straight as a rifle shot, and the tomatoes had come out big and red in the early summer showers. The sun flashed brilliantly on the windmill blades, now idle in the still air, and in the distance the clapboard and shingle homes of the Mexican farmworkers looked like flattened matchboxes in the heat. My three natural-gas wells pumped monotonously up and down, the pipes on the well heads dripping moisture from the intense cold inside,

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and occasionally I could smell the slightly nauseating odor of crude gas. The wells were located in the middle of the cotton acreage, the derricks long since torn down, and the cotton rows were cut back from the well heads in surgically perfect squares, which always suggested to me a pastoral reverence toward the Texas oil industry.

The front lane was spread with white gravel, the adjoining fields planted with Bermuda grass, and white wood fences ran both the length of the lane and the main road where my property ended. The lawn was mowed and clipped, watered each day by a Negro man whom my wife hired to take care of the rose gardens, and there were magnolia and orange trees on each side of the porch. The main portion of the house had been built by Hackberry in 1876, although the logs of Son Holland's original cabin were in our kitchen walls, and it had changed little since. My wife had added a latticework verandah on the second story, with large ferns in earthen pots, and a screened-in side porch where we used to eat iced-tea dinners on summer evenings. After we began to take our meals separately, the porch was used as a cocktail bar for her lawn parties, complete with a professional bartender in a white jacket who shaved ice into mint julep glasses for the Daughters of the Confederacy, the Junior League, and the Texas Democratic Women's Club.

But regardless of the Sunday afternoon lawn parties, the political women with their hard eyes and cool drinks, the white boxes filled with roses, the air-conditioning units in the windows, it was still Old Hack's place, and sometimes at night when I was alone in the library the house seemed to creak with his angry presence.

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I suppose that's why I always felt that I was a guest in the house rather than its owner. Even though I was named for Hack, I never had the gunfighter blood that ran in the Holland family. I was a Navy hospital corpsman during the Korean War and spent three months in Seoul passing out penicillin tablets for clap until I was finally sent up to the firing line, and I was there only six days before I was shot through both calves and captured by the Chinese. So my one attempt at Hack's gunfighter ethic was aborted, and I spent thirty-two months in three P.O.W. camps. However, I'll tell you more later about my war record, my wound and Purple Heart, and my testimony at a turncoat's court-martial, since they all became part of my credentials as a Democratic candidate for Congress.

I lit a cigar and walked down the glaring white lane to where my car was parked in the shade of an oak tree. I had showered and changed clothes a half hour before, but already my shirt and coat were damp, and the sun broke against my dark glasses like a hot green scorch. I sat back in the leather seat of the Cadillac and turned on the ignition and the air conditioner, and for just a moment, as the stale warm air blew through the vents, I could smell the concentrated odor of the gas wells, that scent of four thousand dollars a month guaranteed income from Texaco, Inc. I dropped the car into low, pushed slowly down on the accelerator, and I felt all three hundred fifty horses throb up smoothly through the bottom of my boot. The gravel pinged under the fenders, and I rumbled over the cattle guard onto the main road, then pushed the accelerator to the floor and listened to the tires whine over the soft tar surfacing. My

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white fences whipped by the windows, clicking like broken sticks against the corner of my eye, and I steered with three fingers at ninety miles an hour around the chuckholes and depressions, biting gently down on my cigar and watching the shadows on the fields race with me toward San Antonio and Houston. Several times when drunk I had driven one hundred and twenty miles an hour at night over the same road, hillbilly and gospel music from Del Rio thundering out of the radio, and the next morning I would sweat through my whiskey hangovers and see yellow flashes of light in my mind, the Cadillac rolling over in the field, the white fence gaping among the shattered boards, and I would be inside, bleeding blackly between the steering wheel and the crushed roof.

But sober I drove with magic in my hands, an air-cooled omnipotence encircling me as the road sucked under the long frame of my automobile.

As I neared Yoakum I unscrewed the cap of my flask and took a drink. The white ranch houses and the barns, the cattle and horses in the fields, the acres of cotton, and the solitary oak trees rolled by me. The sun reflected in a white flash off the hood of the car, and ahead the road seemed to swim in the heat. A thin breeze had started to blow, and dust devils spun along the dry edge of the cornfields. On the top of a slope the blades of a windmill turned into the breeze and began spinning rapidly; then the water sluiced out in a long white spray into the trough. At the edge of town I passed the rows of Negro and Mexican shacks, all alike even though some of them were built decades apart, all weathered gray, the porches collapsing, tar

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paper nailed in uneven shapes on the roofs, the dirt yards littered with broken toys, tangled wire, dirty children, plastic Clorox bottles, and garbage set out to rot in boxes. In the back, old cars with rusted engines and spiderwebbed windows sat among the weeds, faded overalls and denim shirts hung on the wash lines, and the scrub brush that grew in the gravel along the railroad bed was streaked black by passing locomotives.

I sipped again from the flask and put it in the glove compartment. It was Saturday, and Yoakum was crowded with ranchers and farmers, women in cotton-print dresses, Mexican and Negro field workers, pickup trucks and battered cars, and young boys on the corner in lacquered straw hats and starched blue jeans that were as stiff as cardboard. On Main Street the old high sidewalks had iron tethering rings set in them, and the wood colonnade, built in 1900, extended over the walk from the brick storefronts. Old men in white shirts with clip-on bow ties sat in the shade, spitting tobacco juice on the concrete and looking out at the traffic with their narrow, sunburned faces. At the end of the street was the stucco-and-log jail where my grandfather had locked up Wes Hardin. It was set back in a lot filled with weeds, and the roof and one of the walls had caved in. The broken timbers and powdered stone lay in a heap on the floor, and kids had smashed beer bottles against the bars and had left used contraceptives in the corners. But on one wall you could still read the worn inscription that an inmate had scratched there with a nail in 1880: *J. W. Hardin says he will kill Hack Holland for nigger meat.*

I had always wondered if Hack ever worried about

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Hardin breaking out of prison, or about Hardin's relatives catching him in the back with a shotgun. But evidently he was never afraid of anything, because when Hardin was released from prison after fourteen years Hack sent him a telegram that read: *Your cousins say you still want to gun me. If this is true I will send you a train ticket to San Antonio and we can meet briefly at the depot.*

Through law school at Baylor I used one of Hack's .44 Colts as a paperweight. The bluing had worn off the metal, and the mahogany grips were cracked, but the spring and hammer still worked and the heavy cylinder would rotate properly in place when I cocked it. After I started law practice with my brother in Austin, I hung the pistol on my office wall next to a 1925 picture of Hack as an old man, with my father in a white straw hat. I had my law degree and Phi Beta Kappa certificate framed in glass on the wall also; but the gun and Hack's creased face and long white bobbed hair dominated the office.

It was almost two o'clock and over one hundred degrees when I reached San Antonio. The skyline was rigid in the heat, and on the hills above the city I could see the white stucco homes and red-tiled roofs of the rich with their terraced gardens and mimosa trees. I turned into the Mexican district and drove through blocks of secondhand clothing stores, Baptist missions, finance companies, and pawnshops. Slender pachucos in pegged slacks and maroon shirts buttoned at the cuff, with oiled hair combed back in ducktails, leaned idly against the front of pool halls and wino bars.

I pulled into the Mission Motel, a dirty white building constructed to look like the Alamo. There were arches and

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small bell towers along an outer wall that faced the street. Cracked earthen jars, containing dead plants, stood in an imitation courtyard in front of the office. The bricks in the courtyard had settled from the rains and Johnson grass grew between the cracks. I took a room that I'd had before, a plaster-of-Paris box with a double bed (an electric, coin-operated vibrating machine built in), a threadworn carpet, walls painted canvas yellow, and a bucket of ice and two thick restaurant glasses placed on the dresser. I cut the seal on a bottle of Jack Daniel's and poured a glass half full over ice. I sat on the edge of the bed, lit a cigar, and drank the whiskey slowly for five minutes. The red curtains were pulled across the window, but I could still see the hot circle of the sun in the sky. I finished the glass and had another. Then I felt it begin to take me. I had always liked to drink, and I'd found that during the drinking process the best feeling came right before you knew you were drunk, that lucid moment of control and perception when all the doors in your mind spring open and the mysteries suddenly reduce themselves to a simple equation.

I dialed an unlisted number given to me three years ago by R. C. Richardson, a Dallas oilman whom I'd kept out of prison after he defrauded the government of fifty thousand dollars on a farm subsidy. He had written out a ten-thousand-dollar check on my office desk, his huge stomach hanging over his cowboy belt, and handed me his business card with the number penciled on the back.

"I don't know if lawyers like Mexican chili, but you won't find none better than this," he said.

He was crude, but he was right in that it was one of the

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best call-girl services in Texas—expensive, select, and professional. I always felt that the money and organization must have come from the Mafia in Galveston, because none of the girls or the woman who answered the phone seemed to be afraid that the client might be a cop.

The woman on the phone sounded like a voice from an answering service. There was no inflection, accent, or tonal quality that you could identify with a region or with anyone whom you had ever met. I used to imagine what she might have looked like. She must have answered calls from hundreds of men in motel rooms and empty houses, their voices nervous, slightly drunk, hoarse with embarrassment and passion, cautious in fear of rejection. I wondered if those countless confessions of need and inadequacy had given her a devil's insight into the respectable world, or if she was merely a mindless drone. I couldn't identify her with the image of a fat, bleached madam with glass rings on her fingers, who would be altogether too human for the voice over the phone. Finally, I had come to think of her as a hard, asexual spinster, thin and colorless, who must have developed a quiet and cynical sense of power in her ability to manipulate the sex lives of others without any involvement on her part.

As always she was discreet and subtly indirect in asking me what type of girl I wanted and for what services. And as always I made a point of leaving my motel registration name—R. C. Richardson.

I hung up the phone and poured another whiskey over ice. Thirty minutes later the girl arrived in a taxi. She was Mexican, tall, well dressed in expensive clothes, and she had

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a delicate quality to her carriage. Her black hair was combed over her shoulders, and her white complexion would have been perfect except for two small pits in one cheek. She had high breasts and shoulders, and her legs were well formed against her tight skirt. She smiled at me and I saw that one of her back teeth was missing.

"You want a whiskey and water?" I said.

"It's too hot now. I'm not supposed to drink in the afternoon, anyway," she said. She sat in a chair, took a cigarette from her purse, and lit it.

"Have one just the same." I poured a shot into a second glass.

"It won't make me do anything extra for you, Mr. Richardson."

"People in Dallas call me R.C. You can use my name in the Petroleum Club and it's better than a Diners card."

"I don't think you'll get your money's worth if you drink much more," she said.

"Watch. I'm a real gunfighter when I get loaded."

I stood up and took off my shirt and tie. The whiskey had started to hum in my head.

"You should pay me before we start," she said. She smoked and looked straight ahead.

My white linen coat hung on the back of a chair. I took my billfold from the inside pocket and counted out seventy-five dollars on the dresser top.

"Does any of your organization come out of Galveston?" I said.

"We don't learn about those things."

"You must meet some of the juice behind it. An

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occasional Italian hood wearing sunglasses and a sharkskin suit."

"Your date is for two hours, Mr. Richardson."

"Take a drink. What about that voice on the phone? Has she ever been laid herself?"

The girl set her cigarette on the dresser edge, slipped her shoes off, and rolled her hose down. I drank a long swallow from my glass.

"Maybe she's Lucky Luciano's grandmother smoking a reefer into the receiver," I said.

"You must not get a chance to talk much."

She stood up, put her arms around my neck, and pressed her stomach hard against me. I could smell the perfume in her hair. She moved the flat of her hand down my back and bit my lip lightly with her eyes closed.

"Don't you think we should start?" she said.

I kissed her mouth and could taste the whiskey on my own breath.

"Why don't you have a drink?" I said. "I don't like a woman to wither under me because of Jack Daniel's."

"You're married, aren't you?" She smiled and worked her fingers under my belt.

"I just don't enjoy women who look like they're in pain when you bend over them. It's part of my R. C. Richardson genteel ethic."

"You must be a strange man to live with."

"Give me a try sometime."

She pushed her stomach into me again, then dropped her arms and finished undressing. She had a wonderful body, the kind you rarely see in whores, with high breasts and long

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legs tanned on the edge of some gangster's swimming pool, a flat stomach kept in form by twenty-five sit-ups a night, the buttocks pale right below the bathing-suit line, and a small pachuco cross with three rays tattooed inside one thigh.

I took off my trousers and shorts and laid them across the top of the chair. I picked up my cigar from the ashtray and looked into the full-length mirror on the closet door. At age thirty-five I had gained fifteen pounds since I played varsity baseball as a sophomore at Baylor. I had a little fat above the thigh bones, the veins in my legs were purple under the skin, and my hair had receded a little at the part; but otherwise I was as trim as I had been when I shut out almost every team in the Southwestern Conference. There was no fat in my chest or stomach, and there was still a ridge of muscle in the back part of my upper left arm from two years of throwing a Carl Hubbell screwball. My shoulders had grown slightly stooped, but I still stood over six feet barefooted, and the bit of gray in my sand-colored hair made me look more like a mature courtroom lawyer than an aging man. Then there was my war wound, two holes in each calf, white and scarred over, placed in an even, diagonal line as though they had been driven there by an archer's arrow.

We made love on the bed for an hour, stopping only for me to pour another glass. My head was swimming with whiskey, my heart was beating, and my skin felt hot to my own touch. The floor was unlevel when I walked to the bottle on the dresser, and my breathing became heavier and more hoarse in my throat. We went through all the positions that she knew and all the experiments I could think

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of, re-creating the fantasies of adolescent masturbation. She affected passion without being deliberately obvious, and she tensed her body and widened her legs at the right moment. After the third time when I didn't think I could go again she bent over my stomach and kissed me and used her hands until I was ready to enter her. She was soft inside, and she hadn't been at her trade enough years yet to enlarge too much. She raised herself on her elbows so that her breasts hung close to my face, and constricted the muscles in her stomach and twisted one thigh sideways each time we moved until I began to feel it swell inside me, then build in force like a large stone rolling downhill over the lip of a canyon, and burst away outside of me with the empty tranquility of an opium dream.

Then I fell into an exhausted whiskey stupor. The dust in the air looked like weevil worms turning in the shaft of sunlight that struck against the Jack Daniel's bottle. The girl got up off the bed and began dressing, and a few moments later I heard the door click shut after her. I was sweating heavily, even in the air-conditioning, and I leaned my head over the edge of the bed to make the room stop spinning. There were flashes of color behind my closed eyes, and obscene echoes of the things I had said to the girl when the stone began to roll downhill. My throat and mouth were dry from the whiskey and heavy breathing, the veins in my head started to dilate with hangover, and I wanted to get into the shower and sit on the floor under the cold water until I washed all the heat out of my body; but instead I fell deeper into a delirium and then the dream began.

I had many dreams left over from Korea. Sometimes I

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would dig a grave in frozen ground while Sergeant Tien Kwong stood over me with his burp gun, occasionally jabbing the short barrel into my neck, his eyes flat with hatred. At other times the sergeant and I would return to the colonel's interrogation room, where I sat in a straight-backed chair and looked at nothing and said nothing until the sergeant brought my head down on his knee and broke my nose. Or sometimes I was alone, naked in the center of the compound, where we were allowed to wash under the water spigot and scrub the lice out of the seams of our clothing once a week. And each time I went there and turned the rusted iron valve I saw the words embossed on the surface—*Manufactured in Akron, Ohio.*

But this afternoon I was back in "the Shooting Gallery," a very special place for me, because it was there that my six days on the firing line ended. That afternoon had been quiet, and we had moved into a dry irrigation ditch that bordered a two-mile plain of rice farms with bare, artillery-scarred foothills on the far side. In the twilight I could see the shattered trees and torn craters from our 105's, and one hill that had been burned black with napalm strikes. We had heard that the First Marine Division had made contact with some Chinese at the Chosin, but our area was thought to be secure. They had two miles of open space to cross before they could reach us, and we had strung wire and mines outside our perimeter, although it was considered unnecessary because the North Koreans didn't have enough troops in the hills to pull a straight-on offensive. At seven-thirty the searchlights went on and illuminated the rice fields and devastated slopes; then the nightly bugles and megaphone

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lectures against American capitalism started. The reverberating cacophony and the unnatural white light on the hills and corrugated rice fields seemed like an experiment in insanity held on the moon's surface. Sometimes the North Koreans would fail to pick up the phonograph needle and the record would scratch out static for several minutes, echoing down off the hills like someone raking his fingernails across a blackboard. Then the searchlights would change angle and sweep across the sky, reflecting momentarily on the clouds, and settle on another distant hilltop pocked with brown holes.

I sat with my back against the ditch and tried to sleep. My blanket was draped around me like iron in the cold, and my feet ached inside my boots. I had gotten wet that afternoon crossing a rice paddy, and grains of ice had started to form inside my clothes. Even with my stocking cap pulled low under my helmet, my ears felt as though they had been beaten with boards. In the distance I heard one of our tanks clanking down a road; then a .30-caliber machine gun began firing far off on our right flank. "What's that fucking asshole doing?" a corporal next to me said. He was a tall hillbilly boy from north Alabama. His blanket was pulled up over his helmet, and he had cut away his glove around the first finger of his right hand. I had a small bottle of codeine in my pack, and I started to take it out for a drink. It didn't taste as good as whiskey, but it warmed you inside like canned heat. The machine gun fell silent a moment, then began firing again with longer bursts, followed by a B.A.R. and the irregular popping of small-arms fire. "What the hell is going on?" the corporal said. He raised up on his knees with his M-1 in his

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hands. Suddenly, flares began bursting in the sky, burning in white halos above the corrugated fields. The corporal's face was as pale as candle wax in the light, his lips tight and bloodless.

The first mortar rounds struck outside our wire and exploded the mines we had strung earlier. Yellow and orange flames erupted out of the earth and flicked around the strands of concertina wire. I could feel the suck of hot air from the vacuum, my ears roared with the thunder of freight trains crashing into one another, and the wall of the ditch slammed into my head like a sledge. The rim of my helmet had cut a neat slit across my nose, and I could taste the blood draining in a wet streak over my mouth. Somewhere down the line, among the shower of rocks and frozen earth, the tremors reverberating through the ground, the locomotive engines blowing apart, I heard a Marine shout, a prolonged voice rising out of a furnace, "DOOOOOOOOOOOC!" I started to crawl along the floor of the ditch on my hands and knees, then the Chinese corrected their angle of fire and marched the barrage right down the center of our line.

Somehow I had believed that if I ever bought one it would come as a result of some choice I had made; that I would be killed after some positive act of my own—no matter how unconscious or reckless—but there would still be a type of control in my death. However, now I knew that I was going to die in the middle of a firestorm. I had no more chance of resisting my death than if God crashed His fist down on top of me. The shells burst in jagged intervals along the ditch, blowing men and weapons in every direction. The corporal was suddenly frozen in an explosion of

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light and dirt behind him. His mouth and eyes were wide, his helmet pitted and torn with shrapnel. He seemed to pirouette in slow motion, the weight of his tall body resting inside one boot, then he fell backward across me. The blood ran from his stocking cap like pieces of string over his face. He opened and closed his mouth with a wet, sucking sound, the saliva thick on his tongue. He coughed once, quietly and deep in his throat; then his eyes fixed on a phosphorescent flare burning above us.

Moments later the firestorm ended, almost too quickly, because it seemed that nothing that intense and murderous could ever end, that it would perpetuate itself indefinitely with its own cataclysmic force. I pushed the corporal off me, my ears ringing in the silence (or what seemed like silence, since automatic weapons had begun firing again on both sides of us). The corporal's helmet rolled off his head, and I saw a long incision, like a scalpel cut, across the crown of his skull. The dead were strewn in unnatural positions along the ditch, some of them half-buried in mounds of dirt from the caved-in walls, their bodies twisted and broken as though they had been dropped from airplanes. The faces of the wounded were white with shock and concussion. Down the line a man was screaming.

"Are you hit, Doc?" It was the first lieutenant. He carried his carbine in one hand. His left arm hung limply by his side.

"I'm all right." Our voices sounded far away from me.

"Get ready to move the wounded out of here. The right flank is getting their ass knocked off. We're supposed to get artillery in five minutes and pull."

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"You're bleeding pretty heavy, Lieutenant."

"Get every man moving you can. We're going to have gooks coming up our ass."

However, the artillery cover never came, and we were overrun fifteen minutes later. Our automatic weapons men killed Chinese by the hundreds as they advanced across the rice fields. We packed snow on the barrels of the .30-caliber machine guns to keep them from melting, and the bottom of the ditch was littered with spent shell casings and empty ammunition boxes. The dead lay in quilted rows as far as I could see. They moved forward and died, then another wave took their place. The bugles began blowing again, potato mashers exploded in our wire, and every time a weapon locked empty or a Marine was hit they moved closer to the ditch. Our only tank was burning behind us, the lieutenant was shot through the mouth, and all of our N.C.O.'s were dead. We fired our last rounds, fixed bayonets in a silly Alamo gesture, and then the Chinese swarmed over us.

They ran along the edge of the ditch, firing point-blank into us with their burp guns. They shot the dead and the living alike, in the hysterical relief that comes with the victory of living through an attack. Their weapons weren't designed for accuracy, but they could dump almost a full pan into a man who was closer than twenty feet. For the first time in my life I ran from an enemy. I dropped the handles of a stretcher with a wounded Marine on it and ran across the bodies, the ammunition boxes, the bent bazookas, the knocked-out machine guns, the lieutenant spitting blood and parts of teeth on his coat, and suddenly I saw a young Chinese boy, not over seventeen, his thin, yellow face

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pinched with cold, standing above me in tennis shoes and quilted clothes. I guess (as I remember it) that I threw my arms out in front of me to prevent that spray of flame and bullets from entering my face and chest, but the gesture was unnecessary because he was a poor marksman and he never got above my knees. I felt a pain like a shaft of ice through both legs, and I toppled over as though a bad comic had just kicked me deftly across the shins.

My Korean recall, born out of Jack Daniel's and sexual exhaustion, ended here. I awoke at six-thirty, sweating, my head thick with afternoon whiskey. For a half hour I sat on the shower tile under the cold water, chewing an unlit cigar. The white indentions in my calves felt like rubber under my thumb.

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