

From Version 2010

. . .where he could keep his eye on the building, sitting, his legs stretched out across the seat, his arms folded, back against the door, watching the lights of the apartment and the people coming and going on the balcony (it was after two in the morning when the guests began coming down to the lobby to ask for their cars, when the doormen began bringing their cars around to the entryway; it was after five when the guests stopped coming down and there were still several cars parked in the entryway, still a few figures moving across the windows in the apartment)—remembering and trying not to remember, and when the memories came involuntarily, being careful not to think about them, where he acquired or learned this skill of patience, so that the waiting doesn't bother him, takes it as a matter of course, something that in the past helped keep him alive, if that's what's required, if that's what needs to be done: it took him two weeks in-country, following rivers and trails through the jungle, but never on the rivers and trails themselves, parallel to them in case of ambushes, he didn't even know which country he was in at that point, then, after he located the plantation, two days without movement in a tree, watching the house through the scope, getting to know the household, their daily routines, watched them gather at mealtimes as he parceled out his rations and water he brought with him, watched the houseboy stealing food from the kitchen and two of the housegirls stealing kisses, until he was sure, watched at night as his subject took the housegirls to bed, the figures backlit from the lantern as they moved within the netting, then later, when the movement was stilled and the house darkened, watched the pot-bellied form come out to porch, the black silhouette moving in the dark and taking a seat in a fan-backed wicker chair, the glow of his cigar periodically lighting his face in the crosshairs until Paul squeezed off the round and the man's face exploded into

blood and Paul was already shinnying down from his perch and folding back into the jungle, back the way he came; remembering too but this time finding a kind of comfort in the memory of later when he was in the mountains of Vietnam living with the Montagnards, after he had been there a few months and had led them in their first firefight when they invited him to climb the tall ladder and join them in the community house where the men were sitting around on the floor and made a place for him and the old man he called Toothy because his name sounded something like that and because he didn't have any took off Paul's boots and socks and placed an old axe head in front of him, placed the bracelet they had made for him on the axe head and placed his bare feet on the bracelet and began chanting, painting his feet and the bracelet and the axe head with rice wine and then directed him to the urn with the rice wine and the old man Toothy handed him a straw and said, "Drink, Gleen Pau, it will take your dreams away and make you strong"— through the night until the black sky turned by stages sea-green then blue above the rooftops, the lights of the apartment still burning, the doors to the balcony still open despite the chill, the draperies sucked outside, playing along the edges of the door frame, by the morning breeze, and Paul fell asleep, without meaning to, his face collapsed against the cool glass of the window.