Philippine War

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James Keats

Dark clouds had been gathering in the west and the apprehensive eye of the hunter and hunted told them that soon the day's sport would be interrupted by the turbulence of a November storm. The day had been warm, too warm for snow or good hunting and now the promised rain disheartened even the most optimistic of the prospective deer killers.

The inclemency arrived before all the retreating hunters had found the old dirt road upon which their cars were parked. But by night all had left except for one car, a prisoner of the mud; the reward for a procrastinating hunter.

In the car sat a man and his young son. The boy, adjusted to the prospect of spending the night in the marooned car, was asleep. The man was awake. He sat with an alert gleam in his eyes resembling the deer he earlier hunted. The rain, in monotonous pattern, resounded as it struck the mud-bound car while thunder and lightning played havoc with the elements encircling the man, who remained unmoved. The flashes of lightning danced through the sky and across his stoic face. His eyes—two organic marbles—held stationary by the surrounding flesh now wet with sweat, peered through the car window.

Presently, an old Ford coupe, with three occupants, moved slowly on the mud road. The driver, constantly shifting gears, maneuvered from mud hole to mud hole with the laboring auto. Its lights, penetrating the tempest for only a limited distance, fell upon the car of a marooned hunter. Before the driver recognized the stranded object flames and thunder leapt not from the sky, but from an unknown source within the mist. Finally the noise ceased with a clicking sound as a rifle hammer fell upon an empty chamber.

In the room sat a dozen uniformed men listening intently to a hunter. He sat in the middle of the room on a small wooden chair. His boots were mud-coated and his clothes damp. His facial features remained apathetic except for a nervous shifting of the eyes; he could not quite comprehend the situation.

He spoke in a low tone, continuously asking where Company B
of the 5th Battalion had erected its headquarters. The room was crowded with men, but none answered. They had all read an army record sent hurriedly with a government file concerning the hunter. Part of the record read—"While retreating in the Philippines, during World War II, Corporal Ashland of Company B, 5th Battalion, engaged and repelled a large enemy force endangering his battalion's position. His unit was retreating on a dirt road during a rain storm and the jeep he was in became mud-bound. The enemy battered the road with artillery fire, killing the other soldier who was in the corporal's jeep. When the artillery stopped, the enemy advanced a large force up the road. Corporal Ashland bravely fired upon them with a machine gun and destroyed a light tank with several hand grenades After several minutes of fighting the enemy retreated with seventy dead. By this action Corporal Ashland saved his battalion and is hereby recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor."

The police officers did not wish to talk after reading the report and the hunter became silent while drinking a cup of coffee. All was quiet. Everything was calm outside, too. The rain had stopped. Next to an old Ford coupe, the front window, shattered with bullet holes, lay three sheet covered bodies; victims of a war fought in the Philippines. They were waiting for the county mortician and his ambulance.