

NIGHT WINDOW

I awoke to a small thud striking the front bedroom window. An odd sound. The kind that makes you think perhaps, in dreaming, you imagined it being more than it really was. Sitting up, I heard another, and then another.

Jack rose out of bed, sidestepped to the window, and cracked the curtains with his index finger. Then he shot through the house and out the back door in his bare feet and faded flannels. I took his place at the window to watch.

Three boys sat in a car out front, headlights off, hurling small objects at the house. One struck the glass near my face.

I saw mice down on the lawn staggering about, running in small circles, flopping like fish on a deck. Then I saw Jack, moving swiftly across the lawn on his stomach, through the shadows, just like he had in 'Nam.

He leapt up beside the car, slid across the hood and landed his white feet squarely upon the blacktop beside the driver's door. The window was down and Jack pulled an offender from the seat, using two hands in one swift motion.

"Eggs!"

The young man winced as Jack pulled him up, face to face. He struggled, his toes barely touching the ground, with Jack's fists clasped tightly on to his shirt.

"Eggs, sir?"

"Eggs. Tomatoes. Toilet paper."

The young man struggled to gain some distance from Jack's stare, to avoid the rancid early morning breath steaming from his clenched teeth. But he could not escape.

"Sir?"

"Boy, you know what happens to a body on impact? To a little mouse when it hits a window?"

The young man shook his head.

"Its bones break, and its guts get torn apart. And then it lands on the ground thinking it's gonna be OK, but it ain't. It runs around all confused, bleedin' inside. Then it stops running, but keeps bleedin', until it drowns inside. It dies a slow, agonizing, painful death, boy."

The others sat motionless in the car, spectators like me.

"Now, I seen plenty of death like that. Plenty. But my woman, she don't need to see such a thing." Jack drew the young man in a bit closer. His voice hushed, "You get me, boy?"



“Yes, sir.”

Jack released his grip. The young man stumbled backward, then scrambled into the car and sped away. Jack stood in the yard a moment, beneath the glow of the streetlight, taking in the pathetic battlefield. He glanced around the neighborhood. One by one, blank faces disappeared into the blackness of their windows, and curtains gently swayed from side to side.

He came back into the house and crawled into bed without speaking a word. I slipped in beside him, nuzzling my head into the cool sweaty curve of his neck. And he wrapped his arms around me tight.

In the morning, he would sweep up the tiny carcasses with a dustpan and dump them into the trash. And, the next weekend, I would wash yolk from our windows and trim. 🍷

