

INTRODUCTION

put together. It's better she don't know. If it was my big brother I wouldn't want to know the truth about the way *he* died.

Of course in another way I'm real good to her [laughs], compared to what I was like to other women before. [Pauses.] Whew! I was one mean motherfucker. She didn't want to know me. You didn't want to know me. You don't want to *know* the number of people I fucked up [pauses], or how I fucked them up.

I don't have very long to live. No, Doc, no, no, I'm not suicidal, it's just that sometimes I don't give a fuck. I don't care if I live or die. I've been waiting to die ever since I got back from Vietnam. When I get that way, my wife, my kids—and I really love them—it's "Get the fuck away from me!" Once when my daughter was younger and I was that way, she came up behind me and before I knew it I had her by the throat up against the wall. I can still see her eyes. I put her down and just walked out of the house without saying anything to anybody and didn't come back for a week. I felt lower than dogshit. I hate it that my kids behave so *careful* around me. I made them that way, and I hate it. Every time I see them being so careful I think of that look in her eyes and I get this feeling here [puts his palm on his belly] like a big stone sitting there.

I think I don't have long to live because I have these dreams of guys in my unit standing at the end of the sofa and blood coming down off them and up the sofa. I wake up screaming and the sofa soaked with sweat. It seems like if the blood reaches me I'm going to die when it does. Other nights I dream of the guys calling to me from the graveyard. They're calling to me, "Come on, come on. Time to rest. You paid your dues. Time to rest."

I never tried to kill myself, but a lot of the time I just don't care. For years I used to go down to the Combat Zone [the Boston red-light district] after midnight and just walk the alleys. If I saw someone down an alley in the dark, I wouldn't go the other way, I'd go down there thinking, "Maybe I'll get lucky." I'm amazed I wasn't killed. I guess I wanted to be killed. Once I came on a guy raping a hooker. She was screaming and screaming, and it was easy to tell he was hurting her bad. I yelled at him, and he turned around and started reaching behind his back. He was carrying. I ran on him so fast and had his elbow before he could pull out the piece [gun], and I pounded the shit out of him. That felt so-o go-o-od. I don't know what happened to the woman. I guess she screwed [ran away] while I was doing him. After that I started bringing a meat fork to the Combat Zone. You know like from a carving set with two—what do

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they call them—tines. I sharpened them real good. I didn't want to kill anybody, and I figured you could only stick that into somebody just so far before it stopped. When I went to the Combat Zone I never went with a gun. And there was a time I was really crazy and driving around town with a shotgun on the seat next to me.

I haven't spent a complete night in bed with my wife for at least ten years. I always end up on the sofa. It's safer for her, and I don't have to worry about waking her when I get up to walk the perimeter. When I was working sixteen hours a day I'd come home; she'd already be in bed. I'd do a couple hours of things around the house and meanwhile put away a case of beer and a fifth so I'd be able to sleep. Then I'd get in bed with her for two, three hours until it was time for work again. But after I couldn't work anymore, and really bad after I stopped drinking, I'd do this crazy shit at night. I once threw her out of bed so hard it broke her shoulder. I thought there was an NVA potato-masher [a grenade] come in on us. Another time I thought *she* was a Gook, and I had my hands around her throat before I woke up. So since I stopped drinking I never let myself fall asleep in bed with her. I lie there quiet until she's asleep and then get up, check the perimeter, and lie down on the sofa where I can see the door.

It's not much of a life for her, I guess. We haven't had sex in four years. She deserves better.

She says I always mess up a good thing—like I don't deserve it. At Christmas I try to make it perfect for the kids with a big, fresh tree trimmed just right and lots of presents, but it's like I'm watching them through a dirty window. I'm not really there and they're not really there, I don't know which is which. Maybe none of us is real. It's like I'm wrapped up in some kind of transparent cocoon and everything gets to me kind of muffled—oh fuck, I don't know how to explain it.

My son asks me if I'll come to his Little League game and I can't ever promise. He wants me to promise, but I can't. It's not that I don't want to go. I was in Little League myself, and I go sometime just at the last minute and watch from the tree line in the outfield. He has a great arm, and once he hit a home run into the trees where I was standing. I had to pull back real quick. You can't have somebody knowing where you'll be.

I'm so envious of all the normal people who can just go to the mall and hold hands with their wife and walk around. You see, I could never do that, because I'd be looking everywhere. Fuck! I