I Have Just Killed

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Abstract

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I HAVE JUST KILLED

I HAVE just killed two people. I'm sorry and ashamed because one of them is a woman and neither one was armed. The man's hair is half gray, and some of the woman's front teeth are missing. The man's open mouth reveals an upper bridge. Both the faces are permanently distorted with fear, and their heads are lopsided. I know that is what my .45 did to them. A .45 slug makes a cold, inwardly puckered hole when it hits, and it takes everything out the opposite side. These people have nothing in their heads anymore, so they are lopsided.

Two hours ago, this man and woman were alive and afraid. They might have left their family in that scattering of bushes when they came toward what must have been their house. Maybe they were hunting food or some possessions they had left behind. They didn't want to surrender or they wouldn't have held parts of bushes in front of them while they approached the house. Moving bushes would make anybody shoot before he said anything. Anyhow, they could have surrendered in daylight.

I saw shadows and bushes moving in the early hours before dawn, so I shot at both of them. They dropped but I kept shooting because they were moving. One of them made a noise of futility, and I shot at the sound. I quit shooting because I couldn't stop it in the darkness.

For two hours I sat and waited for more to come out of the bushes. The increasing grayness made it easier for me to watch with certainty. Finally, the men on each side of me and behind me began to stir and rise from their foxholes, so I began to relax my straining to see.

Ed and I walked out to the fallen figures, and Ed began stripping the pockets of the man. Both of them were breathing like children after hopeless sobbing, but they were too far gone to know or say anything. Brave Major Friche came trotting over to us then, and ordered me to
finish them off when he saw the setup. I shot them again, but something crawled inside me while these people twitched and became bodies. I'm going to live with this inside me, and that damned major won't even think of it again.


MICROSCOPE

Bacteria.
Weight not one millimicrogram.
Diameter hardly big enough to catch one beam of light.
Swimming in an oily hemisphere
As if complete and free to choose.
Swimming freely, blindly,
Always two or twenty,
In rings or long and twisting chains,
The pathway pre-ordained.
Each one red, the world a mottled scarlet;
The student speckles red his clean white circle,
Not knowing he is nonexistent
To the world he scans with bored and watery eye,
That oily universe. His eyelash
Is a planet, and his eye is space
And endless emptiness of sky.

—Elinor Chase, H. Ec. Sr.