

Book II : WAR CRIES

*** SONGS OF GRIEF ***



(21) Mercy Killing

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I can remember how it felt to want to be brave enough to kill.

My fretful childhood sometimes spun such mental images : fantasies of a lion-heart, or what I took to be one : summoning to imagination the enormous, slamming resolution it took to lift a weapon against a Life. Even a small, defenceless life, like a possum, or a deer. They were momentary visitations, about power, about hard mind: Intense, callous. Repellant, mesmerising.

Why ?

What kind of pinioned powerlessness was I suffering (as I indeed was) ~ to make some daydreams come alive with fantasies of military bravery, of being intrepidly injured, of being tough enough to hunt and kill an animal, to catch and bludgeon fish, fire a bullet into living flesh, make something die?

(And never could actually do it. Tried fishing once : failed, recoiled.)

How caught was I, in that phase of childish powerlessness : that my peak of dreamed liberty was to hold absolute power of life and death over another being ?

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And I remember the first time I fired a rifle, at last ; in professional adulthood. I remember the first time I was confronted with the humane obligation to kill a large beast : in extremis, thrashing, no chance of finding a pressurised vein to deliver barbiturate death. The enormity of this new-purchased weapon, its projectile omnipotence : my dread, the fearful reluctance to pick it up and use it.



Did it. Blasted my way into a new echelon of power : the power to detonate anguished consciousness to brain-fragments. And some gate slammed shut behind me, obliterated a lifetime's inexperience in personal practical violence ~ the necessary violence of this explosive merciful death.

Done it since, plenty of times. Learned to see it, in my own hands, for what it is, this small huge-powered machine for delivering fast oblivion to large or wild creatures : this instrument of humane destruction. Though never been able to use it as a first option : cannot, in the end, align it with the proper conduct of euthanasia, of good Mercy-Death. The green barbiturate injection is fortunately, in most cases, a usable choice.



I have a reluctant, grateful relationship with my rifle. Like a sparring partner. Cannot relate to its long-barrel format, its compacted explosive use of energy, the inconceivable terminal velocity of its bullet. But am grateful for its bare scheme and function : its power to foreclose irretrievable suffering in a situation of scale, or violence, or inaccessibility, or danger.



And am constitutionally incapable, in maturity, of comprehending any other adornments of its form or purpose beyond this single-stroke mercy firing : remain baffled by any relationship of passion that develops between a hand, a head and a rifle ; by any crescendo of noise and power that evolves with the automatic weapon : its repeat-firing far beyond the task of simple humane destruction.

*To me this seems as a kind of madness.
Like I suffered in my own bonded childhood dreams.*

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Childhood runs a gamut of suffering. Utter dependence on others is the very partner of fear: fear of failure by the provider, of betrayal, of absence at critical moments of danger or need. And these crises happen all the time : the terror in the very young baby, heard in its frantic scream ~ that vital food and comfort may not arrive immediately. Or the dragging wretched school-days of the vulnerable kid, the fat or plain or stuttering kid, undefended thirty eternal hours of the week, dreading every single school morning.

There are some children who learn a fierce satisfaction in holding others in fear-bondage; and some children who rise over such unhappiness by their own natural goodwill. But there are plenty who leave childhood behind with speed and with relief.

My childhood daydreams of militant power over others arose from unhappy daily experience of being too often at the mercy of other children; in an unkind child-world not yet grown enough to offer compassion. There was excitement, laughter, fun, friendship, some cruelty, ganging up, party-tricks, some gifts ; but True Mercy is a concept of fulfilled maturity, and was quite beyond us.

How children long for simple Mercy. It is the farthest reach from youth ; it is the highest attainment of Maturity : the Merciful Staying Of Our Powerful Hands.

The yearning for the power and bravery to kill is the gut response of the powerless child, the unhappy one, the one who cries for mercy in a merciless playing field.

***And the fear of mercilessness does drive us mad, sometimes,
in our Grown-Up children's world ;
drives us to actually enter our reactive fantasies, take up our fantastic weapons,
and live out at last our childhood dreams of power over life and death.***



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