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Remaining a Soldier

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Remaining a Soldier

paintings line the pale brown walls that hide him from slanty-eyed snipers from enemy sites. He's sick, he says to his secretary, and her eyes focus on a little garden of sweatbeads on his forehead. Sick so he'd like to nosedive right off the top of his skyline-pretty building straight and clean, into a streak of black worsted wool through the cold pea-soup Manhattan morning. Well, truthfully he caught his words just before Marlene heard how sick he was. So she brought him Pepto Bismol, sweet and pink as Shirley Temple, for his stomach. His stomach was right as

rain pouring through trees, through them, making mud and sticky cartoonish blood run down his face. He is thinking about how pretty the world is, how soft and warm, how lucky he is to be part of it. Long gone, initiative and objective and Greek letters forming a backdrop thick and impenetrable as the forest itself, he runs silently, his feet sounding like just two more drops of rain on the green soil. He is thinking something

a beautiful girl. Just lovely. So western, for God's sake, with her spandex and bustier seeming to split at the seams, simply unable to rein in the bouncy curves that sell themselves with the eloquence of sharpshooting, right-below-the-belt girliness. He smiles, wishing she were more than just a lipstick-colored shadow, wishing he could close his eyes and then open them and see, because

I keep getting distracted. This figure is walking toward me, while I sit in this tree with my can of Raid, watching his nose fill with insects but he still stops dead, and stands there, holding his knife and smelling the air. He seems to melt into a tree or a rock or a village, aware and amused by his knowledge that I am there, have always been there, and he picks up a furry something and eats it. I lean over, almost fall out of my hiding place, and am sick. He picks up his pack and

she is running. She goes so quickly, he takes off his loafers and quietly jogs after her, whispering, "a hundred bucks, baby, no AIDS, no VD, I'm so clean, you can be clean too." But she knows something's fucked, and she's fast, especially when the last little sunshine comes through

and makes the blade wink at her, and makes her think about how much she's really worth, how many bodies she can hold inside of her for how many hundreds of

dollars are a man's best friend, skip, sing, he seems happy for the first time in days. The hole in his left arm is closing, and he can move the fingers. Out of ammo, but is that a chopper beating in his brain, or just his little heart? He strokes the pin on his grenade for one moment before pulling it and running into the trees, as screams pierce his brain and he's sure now he's been followed. The ladder comes down from the sky with fatigues and a stretcher, and he's going home to the

times that she can spread them, but that's all over with, a man in an expensive suit smiles like a cat and says nothing, but his eyes are soft, and he cuts her gently and lies a ten dollar bill over her dying eyes. After the one kiss, he replaces his shoes, wipes his knife, and hails a cab. She sees daisies and those designs she drew on her notebook in school, the ones that look like the designs you see when you shut your eyes real tight. The ones that come out of nowhere. The ones that almost look like other people's feelings.

ones. . . .

—Kristina Kruse '93