The Japanese veterinarian woke before 6 A.M. Most of the animals in the Hsin-ching zoo were already awake. The open window let in their cries and the breeze that carried their smells, which told him the weather without his having to look outside. This was part of his routine here in Manchuria: he would listen, then inhale the morning air, and so ready himself for each new day.

Today, however, should have been different from the day before. It had to be different. So many voices and smells had been lost! The tigers, the leopards, the wolves, the bears: all had been liquidated—eliminated—by a Japanese squad the previous afternoon to avoid the animals' escaping as the city came under Russian attack. Now, after some hours of sleep, those events seemed to him like part of a sluggish nightmare he had had long ago. But he knew they had actually happened. His ears still felt a dull ache from the roar of the soldiers' rifles; that could not be a dream. It was August now, the year 1945, and he was here in the city of Hsin-ching, in Japanese-held Manchuria; Soviet troops had burst across the border and were pressing closer every hour. This was reality—as real as the sink and toothbrush he saw in front of him.

The sound of the elephants' trumpeting gave him some sense of relief. Ah, yes—the elephants had survived. Fortunately, the young lieutenant in charge of yesterday's action had had enough normal human sensitivity to remove the elephants from the list, the veterinarian thought as he washed his face. Since coming to Manchuria, he had met any number of stiff-necked, fanatical young officers from his homeland, and the experience always left him shaken. Most of them were farmers' sons who had spent their youthful years in the depressed nineteen-thirties, steeped in the tragedies of poverty while a megalomaniac nationalism was hammered into their skulls. They would follow the orders of a superior without a second thought, no matter how outlandish. If they were commanded, in the name of the Emperor, to dig a hole through the earth to Brazil, they would grab a shovel and set to work. Some people called this "purity," but the veterinarian had other words for it. As an urban doctor's son, educated in the relatively liberal atmosphere of Japan in the twenties, the veterinarian could never understand those young officers. Shooting a couple of elephants should have been a simpler assignment than digging through the earth to Brazil, but yesterday's lieutenant, though he spoke with a slight country accent, seemed to be a more normal human being than other officers were—better educated and more reasonable. The veterinarian could sense this from the way the young man spoke and handled himself.

In any case, the elephants had not been killed, and the veterinarian told himself that he should probably be grateful. The soldiers, too, must have been glad to be spared the task. The Chinese workers may have regretted the omission—they had missed out on a lot of meat and ivory.

The veterinarian boiled water in a kettle, soaked his beard in a hot towel, and shaved. Then he ate breakfast alone: tea, toast, and butter. The food rations in Manchuria were far from sufficient, but compared with those elsewhere they were still fairly generous. This was good news both for him and for the animals. The animals showed resentment at their reduced allotments of feed, but the situation here was better than in zoos back in the Japanese homeland, where food supplies had already bottomed out. No one could predict the future, but for now, at least, both animals and humans were spared the pain of extreme hunger.
He wondered how his wife and daughter were doing. They had left for Japan a few days earlier, and if all went according to plan their train should have reached the Korean coast by now. There they would board the transport ship that would carry them home to Japan. The doctor missed seeing them when he woke up in the morning. He missed hearing their lively voices as they prepared breakfast. A hollow quiet ruled the house. This was no longer the home he loved, the place where he belonged. And yet, at the same time, he could not help feeling a certain strange joy at being left alone in this empty official residence; now he was able to sense the implacable power of fate in his very bones and flesh.

Fate itself was the veterinarian’s own fatal disease. From his youngest days, he had had a weirdly lucid awareness that "I, as an individual, am living under the control of some outside force." Most of the time, the power of fate played on like a quiet and monotonous ground bass, coloring only the edges of his life. Rarely was he reminded of its existence. But every once in a while the balance would shift and the force would increase, plunging him into a state of near-paralytic resignation. He knew from experience that nothing he could do or think would ever change the situation. Not that he was a passive creature; indeed, he was more decisive than most, and he always saw his decisions through. In his profession, too, he was outstanding: a veterinarian of exceptional skill, a tireless educator. He was certainly no fatalist, as most people use the word. And yet never had he experienced the unshakable certainty that he had arrived at a decision entirely on his own. He always had the sense that fate had forced him to decide things to suit its own convenience. On occasion, after the momentary satisfaction of having decided something of his own free will, he would see that things had been decided beforehand by an external power cleverly camouflaged as free will, mere bait thrown in his path to lure him into behaving as he was meant to. He felt like a titular head of state who did nothing more than impress the royal seal on documents at the behest of a regent who wielded all true power in the realm—like the Emperor of this puppet empire of Manchukuo.

Now, left behind in his residence at the zoo, the veterinarian was alone with his fate. And it was fate above all, the gigantic power of fate, that held sway here—not the Kwantung Army, not the Soviet Army, not the troops of the Chinese Communists or of the Kuomintang. Anyone could see that fate was the ruler here, and that individual will counted for nothing. It was fate that had spared the elephants and buried the tigers and leopards and wolves and bears the day before. What would it bury now, and what would it spare? These were questions that no one could answer.

The veterinarian left his residence to prepare for the morning feeding. He assumed that no one would show up for work anymore, but he found two Chinese boys waiting for him in his office. He did not know them. They were thirteen or fourteen years old, dark complexioned and skinny, with roving animal eyes. "They told us to help you," one boy said. The doctor nodded. He asked their names, but they made no reply. Their faces remained blank, as if they had not heard the question. These boys had obviously been sent by the Chinese people who had worked here until the day before. Those people had probably ended all contact with the Japanese now, in anticipation of a new regime, but assumed that children would not be held accountable. The boys had been sent as a sign of good will, the workers knew that he could not care for the animals alone.

The veterinarian gave each boy two cookies, then put them to work helping him feed the animals. They led a mule-drawn cart from cage to cage, providing each animal with its particular feed and changing its water. Cleaning the cages was out of the question. The best they could manage was a quick hose-down, to wash away the droppings.
They started the work at eight o'clock and finished after ten. The boys then disappeared without a word. The veterinarian felt exhausted from the hard physical labor. He went back to the office and reported to the zoo director that the animals had been fed.

Just before noon, the young lieutenant came back to the zoo leading the same eight soldiers he had brought the day before. Fully armed again, they walked with a metallic clinking that could be heard far in advance of their arrival. Their shirts were blackened with sweat. Cicadas were screaming in the trees, as they had been yesterday. Today, however, the soldiers had not come to kill animals. The lieutenant saluted the director and said, "We need to know the current status of the zoo's usable carts and draft animals." The director informed him that the zoo had exactly one mule and one wagon. "We contributed our only truck and two horses two weeks ago," he noted. The lieutenant nodded and announced that he would immediately commandeer the mule and wagon, as per orders of Kwantung Army Headquarters.

"Wait just a minute," the veterinarian interjected. "We need those to feed the animals twice a day. All our local people have disappeared. Without that mule and wagon, our animals will starve to death. Even with them, we can barely keep up."

"We're all just barely keeping up, sir," said the lieutenant, whose eyes were red and whose face was covered with stubble. "Our first priority is to defend the city. You can always let the animals out of their cages if need be. We've taken care of the dangerous carnivores. The others pose no security risk. These are military orders, sir. You'll just have to manage as you see fit."

Cutting the discussion short, the lieutenant had his men take the mule and wagon. When they were gone, the veterinarian and the director looked at each other. The director sipped his tea, shook his head, and said nothing.

Four hours later, the soldiers were back with the mule and wagon, a filthy canvas tarpaulin covering the mounded contents of the wagon. The mule was panting, its hide foaming with the afternoon heat and the weight of the load. The eight soldiers marched four Chinese men ahead of them at bayonet point—young men, perhaps twenty years old, wearing baseball uniforms and with their hands tied behind their backs. Black-and-blue marks on their faces made it obvious that they had been severely beaten. The right eye of one man was swollen almost shut, and the bleeding lips of another had stained his baseball shirt bright red. The shirtfronts had nothing written on them, but there were small rectangles where the name patches had been torn off. The numbers on their backs were 1, 4, 7, and 9. The veterinarian could not begin to imagine why, at such a time of crisis, four young Chinese men would be wearing baseball uniforms or why they had been so badly beaten and dragged here by Japanese troops. The scene looked like something not of this world—a painting by a mental patient.

The lieutenant asked the zoo director if he had any picks and shovels he could let them use. The young officer looked even more pale and haggard than he had before. The veterinarian led him and his men to a toolshed behind the office. The lieutenant chose two picks and two shovels for his men. Then he asked the veterinarian to come with him and, leaving his men there, walked into a thicket beyond the road. The veterinarian followed. Wherever the lieutenant walked, huge grasshoppers scattered. The smell of summer grass hung in the air. Mixed in with the deafening screams of cicadas, the sharp trumpeting of elephants now and then seemed to sound a distant warning.
The lieutenant went on among the trees without speaking, until he found a kind of opening in the woods. The area had been slated for construction of a plaza for small animals that children could play with. The plan had been postponed indefinitely, however, when the worsening military situation made construction materials scarce. The trees had been cleared away to make a circle of bare ground, and the sun illuminated this one part of the woods like stage lighting. The lieutenant stood in the center of the circle and scanned the area. Then he dug at the ground with the heel of his boot.

"We're going to bivouac here for a while," he said, kneeling down and scooping up a handful of dirt.

The veterinarian nodded in response. He had no idea why they had to bivouac in a zoo, but he decided not to ask. Here in Hsin-ching, experience had taught him never to question military men. Questions did nothing but make them angry, and they never gave you a straight answer in any case.

"First we dig a big hole here," the lieutenant said, speaking as if to himself. He stood up and took a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. Putting a cigarette between his lips, he offered one to the doctor, then lit both with a match. The two concentrated on their smoking to fill the silence. Again the lieutenant began digging at the ground with his boot. He drew a kind of diagram in the earth, then rubbed it out. Finally, he asked the veterinarian, "Where were you born?"

"In Kanagawa," the doctor said. "In a town called Ofuna, near the sea, an hour or two from Tokyo."

The veterinarian nodded.

"And where were you born?" the veterinarian asked.

Instead of answering, the lieutenant narrowed his eyes and watched the smoke rising from between his fingers. No, it never pays to ask a military man questions, the veterinarian told himself again. They like to ask questions, but they'll never give you an answer. They wouldn't give you the time of day—literally.

"There's a movie studio there," the lieutenant said.

It took the veterinarian a few seconds to realize the lieutenant was talking about Ofuna. "That's right. A big studio. I've never been inside, though."

The lieutenant dropped what was left of his cigarette on the ground and crushed it out. "I hope you make it back there," he said. "Of course, there's an ocean to cross between here and Japan. We'll probably all die over here." He kept his eyes on the ground as he spoke. "Tell me, Doctor, are you afraid of death?"

"I guess it depends on how you die," the veterinarian said after a moment's thought.

The lieutenant raised his eyes and looked at the veterinarian as if his curiosity had been aroused. He had apparently been expecting another answer. "You're right," he said. "It does depend on how you die."

The two remained silent for a time. The lieutenant looked as if he might just fall asleep there standing up. He was obviously exhausted. An especially large grasshopper flew over them like a bird and disappeared into a distant clump of grass with a noisy beating of wings. The lieutenant glanced at his watch. "Time to get started," he said to no one in particular. Then he spoke to the veterinarian. "I'd like you to stay around for a while. I might have to ask you to do me a favor."

The veterinarian nodded.
The soldiers led the Chinese prisoners to the opening in the woods and untied their hands. The corporal drew a large circle on the ground using a baseball bat—why a soldier would have a bat the veterinarian found another mystery—and ordered the prisoners, in Japanese, to dig a deep hole the size of the circle. With the picks and shovels, the four men in baseball uniforms started digging in silence. Half the Japanese squad stood guard over them while the other half stretched out beneath the trees. They seemed to be in desperate need of sleep; no sooner had they hit the ground in full gear than they began snoring. The four soldiers who remained awake kept watch over the digging nearby, rifles resting on their hips, bayonets fixed, ready for immediate use. The lieutenant and the corporal took turns overseeing the work and napping under the trees.

It took less than an hour for the four Chinese prisoners to dig a hole some twelve feet across and deep enough to come up to their necks. One of the men asked for water, speaking in Japanese. The lieutenant nodded, and a soldier brought a bucket full of water. The four Chinese took turns ladling water from the bucket and gulping it down with obvious relish. They drank almost the entire bucketful. Their uniforms were smeared black with blood, mud, and sweat.

The lieutenant had two of the soldiers pull the wagon over to the hole. The corporal yanked the tarpaulin off, to reveal four dead men piled in the wagon. They wore the same baseball uniforms as the prisoners, and they, too, were obviously Chinese. They appeared to have been shot, and their uniforms were covered with black bloodstains. Large flies were beginning to swarm over the corpses. Judging from the way the blood had dried, the doctor guessed that they had been dead for close to twenty-four hours.

The lieutenant ordered the four Chinese who had dug the hole to throw the bodies into it. Without a word, faces blank, the men took the bodies out of the wagon and threw them, one at a time, into the hole. Each corpse landed with a dull thud. The numbers on the dead men's uniforms were 2, 5, 6, and 8. The veterinarian committed them to memory.

When the four Chinese had finished throwing the bodies into the hole, the soldiers tied each man to a nearby tree. The lieutenant held up his wrist and studied his watch with a grim expression. Then he looked up toward a spot in the sky for a while, as if searching for something there. He looked like a stationmaster standing on the platform and waiting for a hopelessly overdue train. But in fact he was looking at nothing at all. He was just allowing a certain amount of time to go by. Once he had accomplished that, he turned to the corporal and gave him curt orders to bayonet three of the four prisoners—Nos. 1, 7, and 9.

Three soldiers were chosen and took up their positions in front of the three Chinese. The soldiers looked paler than the men they were about to kill. The Chinese looked too tired to hope for anything. The corporal offered each of them a smoke, but they refused. He put his cigarettes back into his shirt pocket.

Taking the veterinarian with him, the lieutenant went to stand somewhat apart from the other soldiers. "You'd better watch this," he said. "This is another way to die."

The veterinarian nodded. The lieutenant is not saying this to me, he thought. He's saying it to himself.

In a gentle voice, the lieutenant explained, "Shooting them would be the simplest and most efficient way to kill them, but we have orders not to waste a single bullet—and certainly not to waste bullets killing Chinese. We're supposed to save our ammunition for the Russians. We'll just bayonet them, I suppose, but that's not as easy as it sounds. By the way, Doctor, did they teach you how to use a bayonet in the Army?"

The doctor explained that, as a cavalry veterinarian, he had not been trained to use a bayonet.
'Well, the proper way to kill a man with a bayonet is this: First, you thrust it in under the ribs, here.' The lieutenant pointed to his own torso just above the stomach. "Then you drag the point in a big, deep circle inside him to scramble the organs. Then you thrust upward to puncture the heart. You can't just stick it in and expect him to die. We soldiers have this drummed into us. Hand-to-hand combat using bayonets ranks right up there along with night assaults as the pride of the Imperial Army—though mainly it's a lot cheaper than tanks and planes and cannons. Of course, you can train all you want, but finally what you're stabbing is a straw doll, not a live human being. It doesn't bleed or scream or spill its guts on the ground. These soldiers have never actually killed a human being that way. And neither have I."

The lieutenant looked at the corporal and gave him a nod. The corporal barked his order to the three soldiers, who snapped to attention. Then they took a half step back and thrust out their bayonets, each man aiming his blade at his prisoner. One of the young men, (No. 7) growled something in Chinese that sounded like a curse and gave a defiant spit—which never reached the ground but dribbled down the front of his baseball uniform.

At the sound of the next order, the three soldiers thrust their bayonets into the Chinese men with tremendous force. Then, as the lieutenant had said, they twisted the blades so as to rip the men's internal organs, and thrust the tips upward. The cries of the Chinese men were not very loud—more like deep sobs than like screams, as if they were heaving out the breath left in their bodies all at once through a single opening. The soldiers pulled out their bayonets and stepped back. The corporal barked his order again, and the men repeated the procedure exactly as before, stabbing, twisting, thrusting upward, withdrawing. The veterinarian watched in numbed silence, overtaken by the sense that he was beginning to split in two. He became simultaneously the stabber and the stabbed. He could feel both the impact of the bayonet as it entered his victim's body and the pain of having his internal organs slashed to bits.

It took much longer than he would have imagined for the Chinese men to die. Their sliced-up bodies poured prodigious amounts of blood on the ground, but, even with their organs shredded, they went on twitching slightly for quite some time. The corporal used his own bayonet to cut the ropes that bound the men to the trees, and then he had the soldiers who had not participated in the killing help drag the fallen bodies to the hole and throw them in. These corpses also made a dull thud on impact, but the doctor couldn't help feeling that the sound was different from that made by the earlier corpses—probably because these were not entirely dead yet.

Now only the young Chinese prisoner with the number 4 on his shirt was left. The three pale-faced soldiers tore broad leaves from plants at their feet and proceeded to wipe their bloody bayonets. Not only blood but strange-colored body fluids and chunks of flesh adhered to the blades. The men had to use many leaves to return the bayonets to their original bare-metal shine.

The veterinarian wondered why only the one man, No. 4, had been left alive, but he was not going to ask questions. The lieutenant took out another cigarette and lit up. He then offered a smoke to the veterinarian, who accepted it in silence and, after putting it between his lips, struck his own match. His hand did not tremble, but it seemed to have lost all feeling, as if he were wearing thick gloves.

"These men were cadets in the Manchukuo Army Officer Candidate School," the lieutenant said. "They refused to participate in the defense of Hsin-ching. They killed two of their Japanese instructors last night and tried to run away. We caught them during night patrol, killed four of them on the spot, and captured the other four. Two more escaped in the dark" The
lieutenant rubbed his beard with the palm of his hand. "They were trying to make their getaway in baseball uniforms. I guess they figured they'd be arrested as deserters if they wore their military uniforms. Or maybe they were afraid of what Communist troops would do to them if they were caught in their Manchukuo uniforms. Anyway, all they had in their barracks to wear besides their cadet outfits were uniforms of the O.C.S. baseball team. So they tore off the names and tried to get away wearing these. I don't know if you know, but the school had a great team. They used to go to Taiwan and Korea for friendship games. That guy"—and here the lieutenant motioned toward the man tied to the tree—"was captain of the team and batted cleanup. We think he was the one who organized the getaway, too. He killed the two instructors with a bat. The instructors knew there was trouble in the barracks and weren't going to distribute weapons to the cadets until it was an absolute emergency. But they forgot about the baseball bats. Both of them had their skulls cracked open. They probably died instantly. Two perfect home runs. This is the bat."

The lieutenant had the corporal bring the bat to him. He passed the bat to the veterinarian. The doctor took it in both hands and held it up in front of his face, the way a player stepping into the batter's box does. It was just an ordinary bat, not very well made, with a rough finish and an uneven grain. It was heavy, though, and well broken in. The handle was black with sweat. It didn't look like a bat that had been used recently to kill two human beings. After getting a feel for its weight, the veterinarian handed it back to the lieutenant, who gave it a few easy swings, handling it like an expert.

"Do you play baseball?" the lieutenant asked the veterinarian.
"All the time when I was a kid."
"Too grown up now?"
"No more baseball for me," the veterinarian said, and he was on the verge of asking "How about you, lieutenant?" but he swallowed the words.

"I've been ordered to beat this guy to death with the same bat he used," the lieutenant said in a dry voice as he tapped the ground with the tip of the bat. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Just between you and me, I think the order stinks. What the hell good is it going to do to kill these guys? We don't have any planes left, we don't have any warships, our best troops are dead. Just the other day some kind of special new bomb wiped out the whole city of Hiroshima in a split second. Either we're going to be swept out of Manchuria or we'll all be killed, and China will belong to the Chinese again. We've already killed a lot of Chinese, and adding a few bodies to the count isn't going to make any difference. But orders are orders. I'm a soldier and I have to follow orders. We killed the tigers and leopards yesterday, and today we have to kill these guys. So take a good look, Doctor. This is another way for people to die. You're a doctor, so you're probably used to knives and blood and guts, but you've probably never seen anyone beaten to death with a baseball bat."

The lieutenant ordered the corporal to bring player No. 4, the cleanup batter, to the edge of the hole. Once again they tied his hands behind his back, then blindfolded him and had him kneel down on the ground. He was a tall, strongly built young man with massive arms the size of most people's thighs. The lieutenant called over one young soldier and handed him the bat. "Kill him with this," he said. The young soldier stood at attention and saluted before taking the bat, but having taken it in his hands he just went on standing there as if stupefied. He seemed unable to grasp the concept of beating a Chinese man to death with a baseball bat.

"Have you ever played baseball?" the lieutenant asked the young soldier.
"No, sir, never," the soldier replied in a loud voice. Both the village in Hokkaido where he was born and the village in Manchuria where he grew up had been so poor that no family in either place could have afforded the luxury of a baseball or a bat. He had spent his boyhood running around the fields, catching dragonflies and playing at sword fighting with sticks. He had never in his life played baseball, or even seen a game. This was the first time he had ever held a bat.

The lieutenant showed him how to hold the bat and taught him the basics of the swing, demonstrating a few times himself. "See? It's all in the hips," he grunted through clenched teeth. "Starting from the backswing, you twist from the waist down. The tip of the bat follows through naturally. Understand? If you concentrate too much on swinging the bat, your arms do all the work and you lose power. Swing from the hips."

The soldier didn't seem frilly to comprehend the lieutenant's instructions, but he took off his heavy gear as ordered and practiced his swing for a while. Everyone was watching him. The lieutenant placed his hands over the soldier's to help him adjust his grip. He was a good teacher. Before long, the soldier's swing, though somewhat awkward, was swishing through the air. What the young soldier lacked in skill he made up for in muscle power, having spent his days working on the farm.

"That's good enough," the lieutenant said, using his hat to wipe the sweat from his brow. "O.K., now try to do it in one good, clean swing. Don't let him suffer."

What he really wanted to say was "I don't want to do this any more than you do. Who the hell could have thought of anything so stupid? Killing a guy with a baseball bat..." But an officer could never say such a thing to an enlisted man.

The soldier stepped up behind the blindfolded Chinese man where he knelt on the ground. When the soldier raised the bat, the strong rays of the setting sun cast its long, thick shadow on the earth. This is so weird, the veterinarian thought. The lieutenant's right: I've never seen a man killed with a baseball bat... But an officer could never say such a thing to an enlisted man.

The lieutenant nodded to the soldier. With a deep breath, the soldier took a backswing, then smashed the bat with all his strength into the back of the Chinese cadet's head. He did it amazingly well. He swung his hips exactly as the lieutenant had taught him to, the brand of the bat made a direct hit behind the man's ear, and the bat followed through perfectly. There was a dull crushing sound as the skull shattered. The man himself made no sound. His body hung in the air for a moment in a strange pose, then flopped forward. He lay with his cheek on the ground, blood flowing from one ear. He did not move. The lieutenant looked at his watch. Still gripping the bat, the young soldier stared off into space, his mouth agape.

The lieutenant was a person who did things with great care. He waited for a full minute. When he was certain that the Chinese man was not moving at all, he said to the veterinarian, "Could you do me a favor and check to see that he's really dead?"

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The veterinarian nodded, walked over to where the young Chinese lay, and knelt down and removed his blindfold. The man's eyes were open wide, the pupils turned upward, and bright-red blood was flowing from his ear. His half-opened mouth revealed the tongue lying tangled inside. The impact had left his neck twisted at a strange angle. The man's nostrils had expelled thick gobs of blood, making black stains on the dry ground. One particularly alert—and large—fly had already burrowed its way into a nostril to lay eggs. Just to make sure, the veterinarian took the man's wrist and felt for a pulse. There was no pulse—certainly not where there was supposed to be one. The young soldier had ended this burly man's life with a single
swing of a bat—indeed, his first-ever swing of a bat. The veterinarian glanced toward the lieutenant and nodded, to signal that the man was, without a doubt, dead. Having completed his assigned task, he was beginning slowly to rise to his frill height when it seemed to him that the sun shining on his back suddenly increased in intensity.

At that very moment, the young Chinese batter in uniform No. 4 rose up into a sitting position as if he had just come frilly awake. Without the slightest uncertainty or hesitation—or so it seemed to those watching—he grabbed the doctor's wrist. It all happened in a split second. The veterinarian could not understand; this man was dead, he was sure of it. But now, thanks to one last drop of life that seemed to well up out of nowhere, the man was gripping the veterinarian's wrist with the strength of a steel vise. Eyelids stretched open to the limit, pupils still glaring upward, the man fell forward into the hole, dragging the doctor in after him. The doctor fell in on top of him and heard the man's ribs crack as his weight came down. Still the Chinese ballplayer continued to grip his wrist. The soldiers saw all this happening, but they were too stunned to do anything more than stand and watch. The lieutenant recovered first and leaped into the hole. He drew his pistol from his holster, set the muzzle against the Chinese man's head, and pulled the trigger twice. Two sharp, overlapping cracks rang out, and a large black hole opened in the man's temple. Now his life was completely gone, but still he refused to release the doctor's wrist. The lieutenant knelt down and, pistol in one hand, began the painstaking process of prying open the corpse's fingers one at a time. The veterinarian lay there in the hole, surrounded by eight silent Chinese corpses in baseball uniforms. Down in the hole, the screeching of cicadas sounded very different from the way it sounded above ground.

Once the veterinarian had been freed from the dead man's grasp, the soldiers pulled him and the lieutenant out of the grave. The veterinarian squatted down on the grass and took several deep breaths. Then he looked at his wrist. The man's fingers had left five bright-red marks. On this hot August afternoon, the veterinarian felt chilled to the core of his body. I'll never get rid of this coldness again, he thought. That man was truly, seriously trying to take me with him wherever he was going.

The lieutenant reset the pistol's safety and carefully slipped the gun into its holster. This was the first time he had ever fired a gun at a human being. But he tried not to think about it. The war would continue for a little while at least, and people would continue to die. He could leave the deep thinking for later. He wiped his sweaty right palm on his pants, then ordered the soldiers who had not participated in the execution to fill in the hole. A huge swarm of flies had already taken custody of the pile of corpses.

The young soldier went on standing where he was, stupefied, gripping the bat. He couldn't seem to make his hands let go. The lieutenant and the corporal left him alone. He had seemed to be watching the whole bizarre series of events—the "dead" Chinese suddenly grabbing the veterinarian by the wrist, their falling into the grave, the lieutenants leaping in and finishing him off, and now the other soldiers' filling in the hole. But in fact he had not been watching any of it. He had been listening to a bird in a tree somewhere making a "Creeeak! Creeeak!" sound as if winding a spring. The soldier looked up, trying to pinpoint the direction of the cries, but he could see no sign of the windup bird. He felt a slight sense of nausea at the back of his throat.

As he listened to the winding of the spring, the young soldier saw one fragmentary image after another rise up before him and fade away. After the Japanese were disarmed by the Soviets, the lieutenant would be handed over to the Chinese and hanged for his responsibility in these executions. The corporal would die of the plague in a Siberian concentration camp: he would be
thrown into a quarantine shed and left there until dead, though in fact he had merely collapsed from malnutrition and had not contracted the plague—not, at least, until he was thrown into the shed. The veterinarian would die in an accident a year later: a civilian, he would be taken by the Soviets for cooperating with the military and sent to another Siberian camp to do hard labor; he would be working in a deep shaft of a Siberian coal mine when a flood would drown him along with many soldiers. And I, thought the young soldier with the bat in his hands, but he could not see his own future. He could not even see as real the events that were happening before his very eyes. He closed his eyes now and listened to the call of the windup bird.

Then, all at once, he thought of the ocean—the ocean he had seen from the deck of the ship bringing him from Japan to Manchuria eight years earlier. He had never seen the ocean before, nor had he seen it since. He could still remember the smell of the salt air. The ocean was one of the greatest things he had ever seen in his life—bigger and deeper than anything he had imagined. It changed its color and shape and expression according to time and place and weather. It aroused a deep sadness in his heart, and at the same time it brought his heart peace and comfort. Would he ever see it again? He loosened his grip and let the bat fall to the ground. It made a dry sound as it struck the earth. After the bat left his hands, he felt a slight increase in his nausea.

The windup bird went on crying, but no one else could hear its call. [1997]