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Legacy

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LEGACY

Twenty years since Vietnam. Hadn't been in our garage in weeks. And when I opened the door, the stench of death and decomposition gagged me. Took twenty minutes moving junk around to find the body of the opossum. Called animal control, then dragged the body out to the curb on an old shovel, breathing in and out through my mouth, angry and shaking. Wanted to talk to my wife, but couldn't find any words. Instead, found my KA-BAR combat knife, went out to the backyard, and threw the knife into the trunk of our sweet gum, again and again, until my left arm ached and I felt guilty about punching any more holes into the tree, blade heavy with sap. I sat in the grass at the base of the tree, fingers sticky where I'd touched the end of the blade. Over and over I pressed my thumb and forefinger together, then pulled them apart, skin deformed by the tension—stretching then parting—the world reduced to that tiny gap between my fingers. And each time, in that final instant between connection and release, I felt as if I were dreaming, everything I touched swollen and razor thin at the same time.