

Recur

Ten, twenty, thirty and even forty years later
—when my own grandson is now eight years old—
I still can't forgive myself for pulling that trigger,
no matter how much mercy I might have shown.

I met the boy on the path that his mother and father and brothers
and sisters had beat beneath their feet, along with every ancestor
who had ever walked that way to the well—where they all
drew their drinking water—and the rice paddies beyond.

The first time we walked down that path the boy surged forward
with his cousins and friends and they swarmed around us
and we gave them our sweets without understanding
anything they were saying. But they were smart kids

and learned to repeat, Okay, Okay, Okay. And the second time
through the village their old grans and aunts and mothers
drew cool water from deep in the earth where we feared
they were hiding the weapons. But we were thirsty

and drank the offering and thought we had slaked
our thirst. But the third time we marched through
that village nothing was the same, not even
their faces, or the sounds they made as we told them

to Move it! Move it! Move it! And when,
through the smoke and sulfur and sweat that clawed at my eyes,
I saw the boy coming down the path again, one arm
was already gone and he held his intestines in the other hand

and I knew that he would receive nothing from us but more
of the same and I kneeled and sighted and pulled the trigger
and watched him flip through the air and land on that path where
his life leaked out, a path he would no longer tread

with his mother and father and sisters and brothers,
all of them taken now by the spirit of the bayonet,
which never admits survivors but chants instead:
Kill, Kill, Kill.

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