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In 1997, I was in Tokyo to direct the opera *Chushingura*. Shigeaki Saegusa, the composer, had long pressed me to take on the world premiere of this work. *Chushingura* is the most Japanese of all Japanese stories: there is a religious ceremony impending; the preparations are in hand; in the course of these, a feudal lord is provoked and insulted; he draws his sword. As punishment for his sacrilege, he is made to commit ritual suicide, seppuku. Two years later, forty-seven of his retainers avenge him by ambushing and killing the man who insulted their master. They know that they must die for such an action. That same day, all forty-seven kill themselves.

Saegusa is a widely respected composer in Japan. At the time of the production, he had his own TV show, and people knew

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about the work we were doing. In the evening, some of us would have dinner together at a long table. Saegusa came late one day, and in a state of high excitement. "Herzog-san," he said. His Highness, the Emperor had indicated he would receive me to a private audience, if I wasn't too busy with the upcoming premiere. I replied: "My goodness, I have no idea what I would talk about with the Emperor; it would be nothing but banalities." I could feel my wife Lena's nails digging into my palm, but it was too late. I had declined.

It was a faux pas, so awful, so catastrophic that I wish to this day that the earth had swallowed me up. Around the table, everyone present froze. No one breathed. All eyes were fixed on their plates, no one looked at me, a protracted silence made the room shudder. It felt to me as though the whole of Japan had stopped breathing. Just then, into the silence, a voice inquired: "Well, if not the Emperor, whom would you like to meet?" I instantly replied: "Onoda."

"Onoda? Onoda?"

"Yes," I replied. "Hiroo Onoda." And a week later, I met him.

LUBANG, A PATH IN THE JUNGLE

FEBRUARY 20, 1974

The night coils in fever dreams. No sooner awake than with an awful shudder, the landscape reveals itself as a durable daytime version of the same nightmare, crackling and flickering like loosely connected neon tubes. From daybreak the jungle has twitched in the ritual tortures of electricity. Rain. The storm is so distant that its thunder is not yet audible. A dream? Is it a dream? A wide path, on either side dense underbrush, rotting mulch on the ground, the leaves dripping. The jungle remains stiff, patient, humble, until the office of the rain has been celebrated.

Then this, as though I'd been there myself. Sounds of voices in the distance; happy cries coming ever nearer. From the bodiless mist of the jungle a body acquires form. A young

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Filipino man comes hurrying along the path, down the slight incline. Curious, as he runs, in one hand he holds up over his head the remnants of an umbrella, now nothing but a wire skeleton and shreds of cloth, in the other a bolo knife. Close behind him is a woman with an infant on her arm, followed by seven or eight other villagers. What has provoked the joyous excitement is not evident. They hurry by, then nothing happens. The steady drip, drip from the trees, the quiet path.

A path, just a jungle footpath. And yet, immediately in front of me, on the right-hand side, a stir passes through a few of the moldering leaves. What was that? Another moment of stillness. Then a section of the wall of leaves at eye level in front of me, that too begins to move. Slowly, terribly slowly, a green man takes form. Is it a ghost? The thing I have been watching all along without recognizing it is a Japanese soldier. Hiroo Onoda. Even if I had known exactly where he was standing, I would not have seen him, so consummate is his camouflage. He peels the wet leaves off his legs, then the green twigs he has carefully fastened to his body. He reaches into the thicket for his rifle, beside which he has concealed his camouflaged rucksack. I see a military man in his early fifties; a wiry build; every movement exaggeratedly circumspect. His uniform is made of sewn-together scraps; the butt of his rifle is wound around with tree bark. He listens intently, then disappears silently after the villagers. Ahead of

me is the clay path, still the same, but new now, different, full of secrets. Was it a dream?

The path, a little lower now, has widened out at this point. The rain is no more than a trickle. Onoda studies the footprints in the clay, listening all the time, constantly on the alert. His lively eyes swivel in every direction. The birds have struck up, calmly, as though to assure him that danger is a word in a dictionary now, a mysterious condition of the landscape. The humming of the insects is regular. I start to hear with Onoda's ears that their humming is not aggressive, is not troubled. From afar the pouring of a stream, even though I have yet to see a stream, as though I were, like Onoda, beginning to translate sounds.