

BAD BILLY MITCHUM

A Short Story

by

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The Fiesta de San Juan comes on June 23rd. It's supposed to be celebrated at mid-summer but it was mid-winter 1975 in Asunción, Paraguay. I had just arrived in country from the Defense Language Institute, and my old friend and classmate, William Mitchum--Bad Billy to his friends--had invited me over to his house to enjoy the festivities. I hadn't seen him since Viet Nam.

He told me to arrive about three so there would be time to have a few drinks, eat some barbequed beef, and catch up for awhile. He told me he had something he wanted to show me. Wouldn't say what it was other than that it would knock my eyes out.

I buzzed the doorbell from the street level. Houses in this town are built like small fortresses surrounded by high walls with broken glass embedded in cement on top. I saw Billy through the steel gate, peeking out at me through the window. While I waited for him to let me in, I wondered what to call him. He'd been promoted early to light colonel; I'd been promoted late to major. I decided to play it safe--rapid rank does funny things to some guys.

"Hello, sir," I said when I reached the front door. "Good to see you again."

"Ernie, you ol' sumbitch! Git yer goat-smellin' ass in here!"