

The Windswept Journal

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(rewrite)

Vengeance

We sat across from each other in the seedy living room of the old house, and I could see the tears well up behind her eyes as she once more glanced up at the inexpensive cuckoo clock high on the wall. At thirty-eight years old, Maude Carney appeared almost twice her age as she stared into the blackness of the night through a large window, a single pane of glass almost four feet wide. Were it daylight she would have seen Bluebirds flitting around two little birdhouses her husband William had built and placed on the fence posts before the war. The yard was much the same as the year before when the poor wreck of a man was alive, but it was not as well kept these days. Maude had said earlier in the evening she remembered watching William's strong back and shoulders stretch through his old cotton shirt as he happily labored away on hot summer afternoons, keeping the grass clipped and trimming the bushes that surrounded the back yard. Across from Maude I tried to hold in my own tears, knowing if I let myself go at least an hour would have to pass before I would be composed enough to take myself home. But how I too yearned for my beloved, lost so senselessly in a storm of hate. I looked around for my things. I wanted to be ready to leave after the clock struck the hour.

Earlier in the evening we had talked of old times when we were younger and stronger, but as the hours progressed toward midnight our conversation lessened and our private thoughts took over. Like the cuckoo we pulled back inside ourselves and closed the little doors. We fell to silence, sitting in each other's presence, our minds elsewhere, my head racing over the events of the past two years. When the clock struck midnight, I half expected Maude to swoon or cry out or at least moan and begin to sob. But she just sighed after the cuckoo finished and said, "I think I'll be getting ready for bed."

"I'm sorry Maude," I said.

"Me, too," she half whispered.

Tonight was the one year anniversary of her husband William's death in the electric chair. Not allowed at the electrocution twelve months before, Maud had sat here at home weeping as the plastic cuckoo blasted out through tiny doors to announce the death of her husband on that night in September of 1949.

The past two years had been an awful time for all of us. In fact, many of the residents of the little town of Sylvan Beach in Central New York had in one way or another been affected. The Beach, as everyone called it, was a small tight-knit community of a few full time residents who spent the uncomfortable winters hibernating by the lake, and then suffered through the summers with tourists who couldn't afford the Thousand Islands to the north on the St. Lawrence River.

When the murder trial finally got started in the summer of '48, I sat in the Oneida County Courthouse in Utica a few rows behind Maude and her husband, watching her touch William's cheek or put her arm across his shoulders when he cried during the testimony of the witnesses who would seal his fate.

"William bothered poor Tomo all the time," I heard Ward Lankton testify. He was the boss from the car repair shop where William and Tomo worked. "I told him to stop, but William was a big guy so I didn't push it."

"Did the defendant criticize Mr. Kanazawa because of his work or because of his heritage, his nationality?" intoned Marvin Stillwater, the county district attorney.

"You mean 'cause he was a Jap?"

"Yes," replied Marvin, "because he was Japanese."

"Well, yeah. Sure, I guess so. William had just been shootin' at them in the war a couple of years ago.

"What happened on the afternoon in question?"

"Well," said Lankton, "I noticed Willam say something to Tomo Billy Bishop was testing an engine so I couldn't hear over the noise ... then Tomo must have said or done something, because William leaned back and threw a punch at him."

"Was Mr. Kanazawa hit?" asked the district attorney.

"He ducked. He was a spry little guy," said Lankton. "Then he popped William twice in the forehead. Never saw a fist move so fast. William fell over like a chopped down tree. We all stood there frozen."

"Then what happened?" asked the D.A.

"Tomo bent over William. I remember he looked worried, like he shouldn't 'a done that. He put out his hand to help William get up."

“Did the fight continue?” asked the district attorney, and I could see that even the prosecutor was bored with this line of his own questioning. Everyone knew the details of the fight.

“William swatted Tomo’s hand away and jumped up,” said Lankton. “You could see William was mad as hell ... face red ... he was fuming. I thought: he’s gonna kill the little Nip ... I mean Japanese.”

Of everyone in the court room that morning, I was probably the only person who would know the big Irishman had been knocked down by a carefully placed double punch to the forehead, a classic Aikido move. It was surprising to me William hadn’t been out cold for ten minutes.

“Then what transpired,” asked Marvin.

“Well, what happened was I jumped in between the two of ‘em as William came up off the floor. I told William to pack up his gear and get out. Pronto! I wouldn’t have any fightin’ in my shop.”

“Had they fought before?” asked Marvin.

“A little shoving, but no punches. I gotta say Tomo was a nice guy. He didn’t deserve to die like that.” Lankton looked directly at William and said, “Carney, you’re a worthless skunk for killing that poor”

“Thank you, Mr. Lankton,” interrupted the D.A. while the defense attorney stood to object. William Carney appeared not to notice.

When calm returned to the courtroom, Marvin Stillwater resumed his questioning.

“Was William fired, then?” asked the District Attorney.

“I never said that,” replied Lankton. “I never fired William. No, sir, that’s not true. It ain’t my fault what happened.”

“No one has stated that, Mr. Lankton,” said Marvin, but I could see that Lankton was very sensitive about the issue.

The foreman continued, “I didn’t want him back, but if William had apologized and changed his attitude, maybe that would be different. I figured he was off on a bender, anyway, you know?” said Ward. “But he never came back. After a few weeks I took his name off the workers list. You know ... Good Luck, Good Bye, Happy Trails.” Wark Lankton then looked at the defendant and said, “I didn’t need his kind of trouble.”

The testimony dragged on through eight of the hottest days of August. I didn’t attend when the coroner and ambulance crew testified about the murder scene. At the end of the first week of the trial on Friday, Maude was called to the witness stand. There was a brief discussion between the judge and the D.A., joined by Maude’s attorney and William’s defense counsel, Robert Winkle, about spousal privileges. Judge Gambill then explained it all to the jury and cautioned they would be hearing from a witness who had strong ties to the

defendant. Everyone in the court room knew that Maude wanted the chance to explain William's actions without condoning them. She believed her husband's mind was deranged. The poor woman was fighting for his life and none of the evidence in this open and shut case was helping. But she must explain his insane actions to the jury and hopefully keep the state from executing him. I sat and listened to her and my soul heaved with guilt. I could sense a tightening in my chest. I so much wanted to help this woman, who such a short time ago had been my best friend. But I would not allow myself to do so.

The temperature had stayed warm overnight and rain began to fall early in the morning before breakfast. The court room was dark and felt soggy at nine a.m. as Maude went forward, mounted the two steps and took her seat. Among the attorneys and the rest of us, Marvin Stillwater was the only person in court that morning who looked crisp in his grey striped suit and starched white shirt. He gave Maude a warm smile before beginning his questioning, and I could see it helped to calm her a bit.

"Mrs. Carney," the D.A. began, "I realize this is difficult for you and so I would like to ask you to just tell us in your own words what happened on the night of the shooting."

"I was asleep," she replied.

Marvin's eyebrows went up in confusion. He had thought Maude would begin a long explanatory account of poor William's mental state since returning from the war.

"You remember nothing, Mrs. Carney?" Marvin asked. He must have wondered if she was being coy, and if she was angling for sympathy. Since the shooting Maude had become a sort of victim in the newspaper accounts, as each day she sat in court solidly supporting her husband. The papers had already decided William was crazy. Since young men from the Beach had lost their lives in Europe and the Pacific, one might have expected a clambake honoring the murderer rather than a trial.

"My husband, William, is a wonderful lunk of a man," Maude said, and then broke down and gushed tears and choked into her hankie. "He drinks too much," she continued in a kind of a stifled wail.

"It was those men down at the bar on the canal that put him up to it," she continued.

"No, no, we tried to stop 'im," a man's voice shouted from somewhere behind me in the courtroom.

"Order in this court!" boomed the judge. "Bailiff, escort that man out into the street."

"Judge, I was just trying to..." began the miscreant.

"Silence!" shouted the judge, who was now quite upset. "Leave, sir, before I throw you in jail for 3 days."

The man was quickly gone of his own accord and everyone's attention returned to Maude.

"I knew there'd be trouble when he came home from the shop that afternoon," she began. "Said he'd beat up Tomo Kanazawa and he was fed up with the place and he would be taking a little vacation. I thought the same thing Mr. Lankton said, that William would go back and apologize in a few days. But he never did. He just sat down there in the cellar all day and night and drank himself silly."

Poor Maude had pattered around upstairs and worried. William might say he was on vacation and working on his building projects, but what she saw was a man doing nothing but sitting in the cellar drinking. Often William wouldn't come up for supper or even for bed and she would find him asleep next to the coal bin in the morning when she went down to stoke the old furnace and throw on a few more shovelfuls.

In the courtroom, Maude sighed and looked across the space to her husband. William sat with his head bowed. It was impossible to know if he was listening.

"Oh, William," she said, "I'm gonna tell 'em" what's wrong with you." There was no reaction from William.

"You see, William was in the war, of course. In the Pacific. He fought the Japanese. They killed a lot of his friends. He has terrible nightmares about it. Mr. Kanazawa was nice man, but all William saw was a Jap. William couldn't understand how a Jap could be holding the same kind of mechanic's job as himself, being paid the same kind of money, while all of his relatives overseas were killing our boys! It was like working with somebody who had just been shooting at you last week and who had killed all your buddies!"

A hush came over the courtroom as no doubt most of the spectators realized Maude was describing what was on all of their minds.

"But Mr. Kanazawa had been in America since the 1920's," said Marvin. "Certainly the defendant couldn't blame him for what happened to his country and their military."

"William doesn't understand things like that," she said. "His head is all messed up ... from the war, from the booze. Don't you see what I'm saying? He was still fighting the war the night he shot ..." And at this point, Maude broke down, dissolving into sobs and tears. When she recovered, Marvin steered her back to the night of the shooting. Nothing she said about it was news to me.

Anyone reviewing the testimony would sense that a burning anger and humiliation must have simmered in William, and on the night of March 3rd he left the house for the first time since his degrading defeat at the hands of Tomo. Maude tried to convince William to stay home and come to bed, but the big man slammed the front door and headed for O'Toole's, a beer joint down near the canal. He had finally worked up the courage to go out and face the group of men who made up the only society he knew, and to explain to them how he had come to get beat up by a little Asian man half his size.

There are different accounts of what took place at the bar, who said what, who jeered, who didn't. But late in the evening, William came back home and got his shotgun from the bedroom closet where he kept it hidden behind the suit he wore to weddings and funerals. Maude lay in bed in the dark, and although she could see nothing, the sounds revealed her husband's intentions. She could tell by his hoarse breathing he was drunk, but she had never known William to harm anyone beyond a punch or two. A zipper sound told her William had removed the pump shotgun from its soft leather bag. She knew he might just wave it around or he might use it, maybe to shoot out a street light to vent his anger, like back in '39 when he destroyed the yellow caution light near O'Tooles and then spent the rest of the night safely in jail. She sighed to herself. What was she to do? Certainly not try to stop him, for that indeed would be dangerous. Better to let him go and call the sheriff's office in the morning to see what could be done and for how much.

As I listened to Maude's testimony, I thought about William's size. He was a big fellow and I imagine he walked about the world feeling physically superior to any man. Now that image had been damaged by Tomo. Deep inside his soul he had been made small. And just as he would never forgive those who had killed his fellow soldiers in the war, he would never forgive Tomo. The seeds of murder were planted in the fertile soil of his raging hate.

William took the stand on the following Monday. After being sworn in, he was asked to tell of his actions on the night of the shooting. He wandered about in his story and had to be coaxed back on track a number of times by the judge and the D.A. Eventually he told of carrying the shotgun through the cold slushy streets to the corner of 12th Avenue and Main Street. He remembered drunkenly lurching to a stop and standing unsteadily in the slush across the street from the apartment over the Blue Blade Hardware store. Upstairs, a light shone in the window and illuminated the ceiling of the room within.

"So you were opposite the Kanazawa's apartment," said Marvin. "Then what happened, Mr. Carney?"

"I got under the streetlight," he said, "so I could see ... to load the shells in the gun."

William stopped and looked up, but not at anything in particular. There was a moment of silence before the D.A. asked him to continue.

"Well," said William, "I heard a train."

"A train" began Marvin.

"A train," said William. "I heard the whistle. I'll bet it was taking a string of coal cars to Syracuse or maybe Buffalo."

"Mr. Carney," said Marvin, now getting impatient, "can you ..."

“It made me think of my trip to boot camp on the train,” continued William. His voice had taken on a quiet and wondering quality that told us he no longer knew he was on the witness stand.

“All of them,” he said. “All of them were gonna try to kill me, but I didn’t know it yet,” he said.

“Who?” asked Marvin, sharply.

William looked at the District Attorney as if he was just seeing the man for the first time, scrutinizing him from his perch on the witness stand.

“Who?” repeated William. “Every frigging Nip west of San Francisco, that’s who. And they almost did.”

A low murmur of voices went through the crowd, as well as muted laughter. The judge sternly reminded William to be careful of his language, and then directed him to continue.

William remembered swaying a little as he stood under the street light. He said he took aim at the upstairs window, clicked the safety off and pulled the trigger. A half pound of bird shot blasted out the front of the barrel with a terrible punch of sound that rang his ears. The kick of the gun knocked him backward, but he somehow remained on his feet. Just above the hardware store sign, the upstairs window disintegrated into a fountain of tiny pieces of glass and the room was plunged into darkness.

“Did you see Tomo or his wife through the window of the apartment?” asked Marvin Stillwater.

“No,” said William, “I wasn’t aiming at nobody. I just wanted to scare Tomo. That’s why I shot their ceiling. I was just trying to even things up, you know?”

“How could shooting out their window even things up?” asked Marvin.

“I don’t know. Tomo thought I was scared of him after he knocked me down. This way he’d be afraid of me,” William replied.

“Were you? Were you afraid of Tomo after he bested you in a fight?” asked the D.A.

William’s face turned red with anger. He said nothing. Marvin remained quiet, possibly hoping the jury would see how quickly the defendant was moved to anger. Finally, William shrugged and seemed to regain himself. I wondered why his attorney hadn’t objected.

“I was standin’ there on the street,” William continued, “and I realized I was crying! And I was drunk, but it was like all of a sudden I was sober. You ever have that happen to you?”

Marvin shook his head no.

"I couldn't believe it!" said William. "Mrs. Kanazawa came out the downstairs door and high stepped right across the slop and slush in the street, right over to me. She had a pistol and pointed it at me!"

"Are you sure she had a gun, Mr. Carney," asked the D.A.

"Yeah, I'm sure," William answered.

"Because of everyone involved that night," said Marvin, "you're the only person who saw it. Now don't you think that's a bit strange?"

"Objection!" shouted Robert Winkle, a bit on the late side. "Your honor, this is highly prejudicial to my client"

"Mr. Stillwater," interrupted the judge as he spoke to the D.A., "You will not indirectly testify to the jury in my court. You will refrain from such behavior and you will get on with your job of questioning the defendant. Am I making myself clear, Marvin?"

"Yes sir," said the D.A.,

"I tell ya, she had a gun!" said William. "And later ..."

"We heard you," Martin interrupted peevishly. "Now, please continue with your testimony."

"Well, that's why I was aimin' the shotgun at her. I pumped another shell in the chamber. I kept yelling at her, 'put the gun down, drop the gun.' But she kept coming, with the pistol pointed at me. She came right up to me. Then she dropped the pistol in the snow. Just stood there looking at me. She reached up and grabbed the barrel of the shotgun. My God, why did she do that? I pulled back with both hands and the gun went off. Boom! I thought my heart stopped. There she was lying on the ground, bleeding and moaning and ... Jesus, all I wanted to do that night was scare Tomo!" William covered his face with his hands.

"Then what happened," asked the D.A. after a moment.

William gave forth with a long sigh.

"I shoulda helped her," he said. "I shoulda.

"What did you in fact do," asked Marvin, a hint of impatience creeping into his voice.

"I ran. I ran home. Or tried to. About half way, Tomo caught up to me. He had the pistol. He was shouting some gibberish at me. I stopped and he was dancing around me in a circle shouting something ... in Japanese, I guess ... I was twirling around, trying to keep my shotgun on him, telling him to drop his pistol.

"What happened next?" asked Marvin, and for some reason, the tone of his voice indicated a real desire to know exactly what did happen.

William slumped back in the witness chair. He raised his hands and opened them as if he had no idea what the answer was.

"I'm so tired of telling what I saw ... what I guess I saw ... maybe I should tell you what the police say happened."

"You should tell us what you believe to be the truth," the D.A. said.

"All of a sudden," William testified, "I was back on Corrigedor. I remember it was so hot. The sun was so bright. My head felt like it was split open by the sun ... that sun! ... and the heat was awful. I was standing nose to nose with a Jap soldier. I suppose it was Tomo, but I don't remember clearly. We were pointing our guns at each other and I thought, maybe we'll just back off and go our separate ways. I took one step backward. Maybe we won't have to die, either of us. But then the second soldier showed up.

"Go on," said Marvin.

"Now there were two of them, don't you see? Pretty soon they'd both have the drop on me. I just started firing," said William.

"You shot Tomo Kanazawa?" asked Marvin.

William looked up at Marvin as though he had just explained the simplest concept to someone who clearly didn't get it.

"I shot one of the Jap soldiers," said William. "I blew his arm off."

The courtroom was very quiet.

"Yes," William continued, "I guess I shot Tomo. I just wanted to get off that beach alive ... away from that god-awful heat ... the explosions, the blood, the death. I just wanted to get home. I shot him and I ran. I ran home."

The noon recess was called and the bailiff led William out of the courtroom through the door behind the Deputy's desk. In a few minutes the Deputy would come and take Maude to meet with William so they could share a sandwich. As I watched William and then Maude leave the court, I sat riveted to my seat, my legs having suddenly gone so weak I could not get up to leave. I had not heard the details of William's story before and like everyone had read only summary statements in the newspapers saying William evidently imagined himself in combat back in the Pacific when he shot Tomo. But I had not heard of the second soldier.

Afterward, when everyone had returned to the courtroom and was seated, the court clerk stood and announced, "The State calls Mrs. Tomo Kanazawa to the stand." I stood and shakily walked forward, mounted the steps to the witness stand and seated myself.

"Are you Mrs. Ayano Kanazawa," asked the D.A.

"Yes, Marvin, I am" I replied. I had meant to be cool and calm, but now I was swamped with grief for my husband. It was a few moments before I could make my voice work to answer the questions.

“May I remark, Mrs. Kanazawa,” Marvin said kindly, “that you have no accent.”

“That is not true,” I said with a smile. “My accent is from Wyoming. My grandfather came to America to help build the Union Pacific railroad,” I said. “I was schooled in a Christian academy in Cody, Wyoming before my family moved east to New York. I am Sansei, third generation American Japanese. Tomo came from Japan to the University where I met him in 1928. We moved to the Beach in 1933 when Tomo sensed the coming war and argued with his Japanese employers in New York City.

“Mrs. Kanazawa, had you known the defendant before the night of the shooting?” asked the D. A.

“Yes, his wife and I were friends and we attended church together. She and I often worked on committees together. We went to movies together, and sometimes lunch or dinner. Just the two of us. Given Mr. Carney’s feelings toward Asians, I never went to their home. And certainly my husband did not.”

Maude Carney was in fact the best friend I had made at the Beach. Although Tomo had no beliefs, my religious upbringing naturally led me to the little church on Spencer Ave. where I met Maude. She had the kindest smile and welcomed me without suspicion while the other members initially held themselves back. To them I was foreign, but worse a member of the race which was becoming the scourge of the Pacific.

I remembered the evening I sat in my apartment with Tomo reading and my heart was heavy with loneliness for the people who had always been around us in New York City just two months before. A tiny knock sounded at the downstairs door and Tomo went down and brought up the night visitor. “A lady from your church,” he announced as he ushered Maude into the small living room. There she stood, a smile as bright as the noon day sun and bearing her first attempt at Yakisoba. The noodles were terribly American, but fried nicely, and the vegetables were sweet and tasty. Even Tomo broke out in a grin as he ate the snack. That was the evening Maude mentioned that her husband’s employer was looking for another mechanic or trainee.

“Mrs. Kanazawa, can you tell us in your own words what happened on the night of the shooting?” said the District Attorney.

“Tomo and I were about to go to bed when our front window was blown out. Tomo froze in his chair. He had what I believe is called shell shock from when he fought in China years ago, before he came to America. I’d seen this happen to him before when a very loud noise surprised him.”

“How long was he immobile,” asked Marvin.

“Not long,” I said, “I know, because of what happened later. But I jumped up from my chair almost immediately and looked out the window. Mr. Carney stood across the street with his shotgun pointed at the ground.”

“And what did you then do,” said the D.A.

“I ran down to the street to stop the fool before he decided to fire again.”

“You didn’t call the police?” asked Marvin.

“As you know,” I said, “The Beach depends on the County Sheriff’s Patrol. I didn’t think we could afford to wait that long, but I do remember thinking Tomo might call them if he recovered soon.”

“Weren’t you afraid, Mrs. Kanazawa?” said Marvin.

“Of course I was,” I said, “but I didn’t think Mr. Carney would really try to hurt me on purpose. I thought if I could grab the gun away from him we’d all be a lot safer.”

“And then?” said the D.A.

“I grabbed the barrel of the gun and it went off, tearing flesh from my index finger and some from my middle finger.” I held up my mutilated hand for everyone to see. It had healed well in the past year and only the attorneys in the front row might have noticed the damage at that distance.

“And?”

“Tomo came down the stairs and out into the street as Mr. Carney was running away. Tomo helped me toward our home, but then said he must stop William from hurting anyone else.”

“Rather than see to your safety, Mrs. Kanazawa?”

“Tomo was not a samurai, but he knew the nature of duty,” I said.

“And Tomo had no weapon?” said Marvin.

“By then we realized Mr. Carney was drunk, and Tomo was a martial arts expert. And I ... encouraged him to stop Mr. Carney before he hurt himself.”

I glanced over at the jury. They appeared doubtful.

“Besides,” I added, “there was nothing to be done for my hand except to stop the bleeding, which I knew how to do. But then I worried for Tomo and so I wrapped my hand as best I could in the front of my blouse and I ran after him. When I was half way to Vienna Road where Mr. Carney shot him, I heard the gun go off. I found Tomo lying in the snow, his arm” I had to stop for a moment. “I screamed and screamed and by then people were roused by the noise and the ambulance came. But it was too late. My husband bled to death.”

I sat on the witness stand and felt sick with anger and loss. I can still remember the warm blood from Tomo’s heart pumping out of his body as I tried to stop the bleeding. His eyes looked at me one last time in a mixture of fear and love and then glazed over in death. This pig of a man who killed him, sitting across

from me staring at the floor, would die in the electric chair if I could help it. I truly felt sorry for poor Maude, but her husband deserved to die.

“Now Mrs. Kanazawa,” Marvin continued, “there has been testimony of another gun, a pistol that Mr. Carney said you pointed at him, and your husband allegedly used to menace the defendant.”

“I know nothing of another gun,” I said. “I have no gun and I know that Tomo did not have a gun.”

“Did you see a pistol at the crime scene ... where your husband was killed? On the ground or anywhere?” asked the D.A.

“No,” I replied. “I saw nothing on the ground but my dying husband.”

“There!” I thought to myself. “I have sealed our fates, but I didn’t care. William Carney must die as my husband died. And he would get off with life in prison if the court suspected or knew of the existence of the small pistol that now sat wrapped in an old coal bag under a floor board in my kitchen.

I looked William Carney straight in the eye as I denied the existence of the pistol. He looked back at me and frankly I don’t know if he was sure I was lying. He was so confused he may have believed me. When I finished my statement, he nodded his head, as if in acceptance. For the first time, I almost felt sorry for the man and wished for him to die bravely. Maude continued to stare down the whole time, not looking at me.

The case for the defense was hardly worth the short time it took to present. Robert Winkle evidently wished to throw his client’s life on the mercy of the court and the jury. He called a number of psychiatric witnesses, but none were convincing enough to persuade the jury that William was anything more than a bully who may or may not have been unhinged by his combat memories. Of course, many in the court room had been affected by their own war experiences, but none had shot a man in cold blood. Still, there was a feeling among the citizens of the Beach that William might avoid execution because of the war. He didn’t.

William was convicted of first degree murder and sent back and forth between the county jail and the state hospital for the insane. Although the court asked for new tests a number of times, he was finally judged to be responsible for his actions. He never came home again. I didn’t know whether Maude believed her husband or my story about the pistol. I had not spoken to her since the murder, just nodded when our paths crossed in church when we both returned to services on Sunday mornings shortly before the trial began.

A few weeks after the verdict, William Carney was sentenced to die in the electric chair. A year later, on a softly beautiful early fall evening in September of 1949, after all the appeals and a final effort to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment, they marched him into a room in the basement of the prison and strapped him in the electric chair. With a chaplain and three reporters from the newspapers acting as witnesses, including Bob Buttoni of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle who wrote these details in an article for

his newspaper, the executioner connected the wires to the electrode cuffs on William's wrists and ankles. These were tested for ground and then the skull bowl with wires attached was placed on the top of his head and secured with a strap under his chin. Over this assemblage and across his face was placed a hood with a slit up the back for the skull wires. Although not part of the regulation equipment, his bare feet were lifted and placed in an ordinary pan used for foot baths. This was filled with water from a pail to a height that covered the ankle electrodes, thus insuring excellent contact between his legs and ground. The prison wanted William to go quickly, for his sake and for theirs.

As the wall clock marched toward 11:55 p.m., the Warden picked up the phone and listened for a dial tone to make sure the line would be open in case a last minute reprieve was sent, although none was expected. At five seconds before midnight, as the generators spun up to deliver William into the hands of his creator, Buttoni leaned forward, closed his eyes and dipped his head. He had watched an electrocution only once and would never do so again. The sound was bad enough, he wrote.

While Maude sat alone at home that night, I too sat crying over my lost Tomo in the apartment we had shared. My thoughts roamed from the summer evening we met to the winter morning we parted as he lay dying in my arms. In the short space of twenty minutes I had gone from comfortably getting ready to go to bed that night with my husband to sitting in the street, a widow, covered with his blood.

When our front window disintegrated and Tomo sat glued to his chair, I jumped up and saw William standing across the way, under the street lamp of all places. I ran to our bedroom closet and quickly got the small pistol. Tomo had gotten it some years before from a man who owed him money. He called it a gambler's gun because it fit easily in a pocket. Tomo said it was for our protection and taught me how to use it. That's why William described me high stepping over the slush filled street, exactly as Tomo had taught me, to keep from having to look down in front of me and take my eyes off the target. William kept shouting for me to drop the gun. I said nothing but continued toward him. I was deathly afraid, but I knew if I didn't disarm the drunken man, he could continue his rampage, killing myself and my husband, who now sat stupefied in our living room, unable to protect us. I thought, "If he brings the shotgun up and points it at me, I'll put two bullets in his chest and one in his face, just like Tomo taught me." Pop, Pop, Pop. But when he raised the shotgun, I couldn't do it.

I walked right up to the idiot and the two of us stood rooted in the slush and snow pointing our guns at each other, faces a mere three feet apart. A moment passed in silence, except for the sound of William's sobbing and sniffing, and then the rumbling on the stairs behind me as I heard Tomo come running down to the street. I looked at William's pitiful crying face and I threw the pistol to the ground. Reaching up, I grabbed the tip of the shotgun to push it from me and steer it away from Tomo. The shotgun went off while I still had my hand on the muzzle. William ran away down the street.

When Tomo reached me, I lay in the slush curled up in a fetal position, my hands between my legs. God, it hurt so! I kept insisting I was all right as he

helped me to my feet. Torn between his concern for me and his anger, Tomo scooped up the pistol and ran after William. With tears of pain and shock flooding my eyes, I walked toward the apartment, but then turned in the direction of the two men. I remember thinking, "I must follow Tomo." I don't know exactly what I thought I could do to help.

I rounded the corner of Vienna Road and was almost on top the two men. I stopped short and stood like a statue no more than thirty feet away. Tomo was screaming and cursing in our language and telling William to drop his shotgun. He danced around the big man as William twirled to keep his aim on my husband. Suddenly, William stopped moving and looked over to me. Tomo did the same. In the street lights, I could see the surprise on both their faces. But William's was being horribly transfigured as I watched. He didn't look human. His eyes were bulging and I've never seen a grimace like that on a person's face. Then William turned back to Tomo and pointed the shotgun, but my husband was still staring at me. I shouted, too late. William pulled the trigger and blew my husband's arm off. Then he ran.

No one will ever know what caused William in his deranged drunken mind to imagine first one, then two soldiers being upon him. But in agony I wonder if I had not followed the men, Tomo might still be alive. I was the second soldier.

Trying to stem the flow of my husband's blood, I pushed snow into the hole where his arm had been, all the while screaming for help. It was no use, he died before the ambulance came. I picked up the pistol and hid it under my clothing before anyone arrived. As the eastern sky turned a dirty grey and the winter morning dawned, I sat in the light freezing rain and cradled my dead husband's body and promised I would avenge him, if it took the rest of my life. I know duty. And I know honor.

But now I also know guilt, for I have killed a man by bringing about his execution. And I have taken him away from a woman I had loved like a sister. I wanted so much to call Maude or to take her aside when we met in church, to put my arms around her and with no words that I could possibly think to say, simply hold her as we were each assailed by the fates that had brought us our terrible grief. Instead we continued to live out our individual existences. How I lamented our separation. We should have been with each other in our suffering, doing whatever two people do to help each other through our misery. Our grief was so large there wasn't any energy left for blame.

But as time marched toward William's execution, I became afraid that for Maude's sake I might break down and tell the truth, to absolve myself from the gnawing guilt and to acquit myself of the perjury, thereby dishonoring the memory of my husband and the promise I had made to avenge his murder.

Some nights I lay in my bed quaking in fear for the punishment that awaited me, either in this life or the next, I knew not which. And when I finally fell asleep, the terrible dreams would come for me, of limbs torn off, blood sprayed through the air. In the worst dream of all, I was somehow William, the man I killed, but I know it was also me. In the dream I was both of us. I found myself in darkness, hearing the sound of my own breathing, suffocating under a hood in the stink of my cold sweat, with feet in a pan of water and my arms cuffed to the chair. The sound of an electrical generator running up ended with

a final searing explosion inside my head as I dropped into an awful pit of fear where I stood accused.

Maude called me on the day before the one year anniversary of William's execution and asked me to come and sit with her the next evening. I longed to be with her, but was afraid of not being able to control myself.

"Please," said Maude, "we should be together through this. We were friends. We each lost the man we loved. And we each had a part in it."

That last phrase made me fearful. I did not want to face the lie I had told that killed her husband. I did not want to face Maude. But she was right, we should be together through this.

And so here we sat in her living room, the midnight hour now past, she having said she was ready for bed, me gathering my hat and purse to take home. No accusations had been made.

"It was awful for William," she said from out of the blue.

"Well" I began.

"I know, I know, it was awful for Tomo, dying in the street. But William sat there in prison for a year scared witless, not eating, crapping his pants every night while he was sleeping. It was just awful."

"Maude, I'm sorry you lost your husband. And I'm sorry both men had to die." I opened my purse and took out my gloves, getting ready to leave.

"I need to tell you this, Ayano," she said. "You know why. You know what you did."

I sat back in my chair. I knew eventually this moment would come and I was in one sense relieved that it was finally here. I always expected there would eventually be a resolution.

"There was nothing left of William," Maude said. "All he spoke of was home, but he never held on to any hope for a reprieve. For a while there was talk his sentence might be changed to life, but Governor Dewey refused."

"Oh, Ayano, he was so afraid. He could never find the words to say so. You know, after the trial he never said anything about the shooting, or even about being in prison. I sometimes wondered if he knew he was there. All he talked about was the war and the battles he had survived. The last time I saw my William was the day before the ... the way they killed him. All he could talk about was wanting to be home. It was the only time in prison I saw tears in his eyes, but he didn't cry like anybody would. He told me how he had missed me during the war. Every night in a foxhole somewhere on the other side of the world he dreamed of walking through this front door here at home. He said he'd sweep me up in his arms and take me to sit on his lap in that very chair you're sitting in, his chair. And he would look out this window on the grass and trees and birds and flowers and know he was home."

I shifted uncomfortably in the chair. I was now crying quietly, thinking of how I missed Tomo.

Maude was quiet for a moment and then she spoke.
“Ayano, what have we done here?”

“What do you mean?” I said.

“Ayano, I killed Tomo by letting William go out that night with the shotgun. I should have called the Sheriff. But I hadn’t the slightest thought he might go to your apartment. William didn’t hurt people. I thought he might shoot out the traffic light down near the bar.

I remained silent.

Maude continued, “You think you killed William, but you didn’t,” she said. “If you had admitted to having the pistol, he might have gotten life, but he would have died in that place by now. Maybe you saved him another year of agony.”

“I’ll tell you the truth,” I said, “I didn’t mean to save him anything. He killed my husband, and for that he had to die.”

“I know,” said Maude.

“Will you go to the police?” I said.

“Police? I have no proof,” she said. “And if you went to jail for perjury, wouldn’t that be a fine mess. First my husband kills your husband and then I have you sent to jail.”

We sat for another few minutes more in the quiet of the late evening. It was ten minutes past midnight. I didn’t want to hear the cuckoo again at twelve-fifteen. I stood and walked over to her chair, bent and kissed the top of her head.

“I’m sorry,” I said once again. “There seems no way out of this ... the hurt and the guilt and the terrible loss.”

“I know,” was all she said.

I let myself out the front door. It was such a beautiful autumn night, the leaves beginning to fall from the trees and temperatures just turning cool. I began the walk of a few blocks home, the same route William took on the night he killed my husband. When I came near the corner of Vienna Road and Main Street where my husband died in my arms, I did not stop, I couldn’t. I walked on; the agony in my soul was so great.

I carry the terrible pain of loving and losing someone, left to spend the rest of my life alone. I will never regret avenging Tomo's murder by causing the death of William, but at the same time I cannot forgive myself for bringing to Maude the same loss and desolation I suffer. And God will never forgive me for the seething hate still burning in my heart that allowed me to kill the man who made me a widow. Some day in hell William and I will stand in the dock

together, yoked as two murderers, equally guilty of killing a man and breaking the heart of the woman left behind in desolation to struggle on without him.

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This story was inspired by the murder of a Japanese man in Central New York in 1943. In the real case, the shooter was judged sane, pleaded guilty to second degree manslaughter and was later released from a psychiatric institution to die of natural causes in 1946. The district attorney would have had a terrible time getting a conviction for any higher charge during war time. The jury selection process was tough enough. I was acquainted with the murderer's wife, Maude (nee Bertha), who died at age 88 in 1970. Her name was not Carney.

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