

Holiday Party

They were still talking. Donald was yards away. He was walking, backwards. Tipping, leaning, but they were still talking. Loudly. He smiled. Or rather, he didn't stop smiling. He waved. Still, they were all talking.

"You saw the pass, didn't you, Donald?" Jim nudged his wife, Irene. "He saw that crazy pass."

"It was something," Donald said. He was still in motion. Moving down the hallway. "Oh, I saw it." He was shouting now. Making circles with his bottle of beer. Still talking to them. But from behind the wall.

He turned his back, and shuffled along in his slippers. He heard Jim ask Irene something. At the end of the hallway, he took a right, and started humming. The chatter almost drowned out the radio. But he still got bits and pieces. Enough to hum along. "Mmmm, mmmm, siiii-lent night," he sang.

At the end of the hall, he stopped. "Holy night," he sang, and took a sip of beer. He looked around for a table. Finding none, he sat his drink on the floor. He reached up and felt for the door knob. The door swung slowly. It sank, and pressed itself into the carpet.

Donald flicked on the light. He saw the case he wanted. It was on the floor, under a box. Under that hulking dusty box of dresses and shoes. "All is calm," he half-hummed. The box was heavy. Too heavy for one. He began to pull things out.

A burgundy dress. Thick, and faded.

A brown one. Scratchy.

A black one. Not a dress, this one, but a robe. He peered at the robe more closely. His lips loosened.

"Now this!"

It was silken and heavy, and it had a depth that made the black look blue at the folds, with its tight brocade. He unfolded it to get a better look, and the fabric turned itself out in longish waves down his legs. Scents of ancient silk and tea rose from the cloth, and Donald took a breath, his eyes becoming narrow.

He held it to his chest, and looked down the kimono's length, which was layered in a pile below. Donald turned his head, looked behind him, out the door, for a few moments, then looked back down. He held the silk robe out, and began to pull a sleeve around his sweated arm.

Slowly, he wrapped the kimono behind him, pulling the left sleeve on as well. The silk caught on his rough, cracked hands, so he made tight fists and tugged the collar in longer, ordered motions. He ran his fingers across the cloth, dragging them over the front. Once both sleeves were on, he was wearing the kimono and it was open and curtained around his waist in undulating folds. He looked down again, and took a short breath.

He looked in the box, and saw a soft tie and a sash laying on top of the dresses. He leaned over, reached in, and pulled out the soft tie, letting the wide kimono sleeve flow down his arm and around the box. As he straightened up, in a single motion he swept the right front of the kimono over his chest with his right hand, then swept the left front over the right. As he held the front in place, he slid the tie around in a straight line with one hand, and held the other end at a precise angle, then he tied the tie to the side.

Again he looked down, but this time slowly and deliberately, keeping his eyes straight and moving only his head. His fingers were starting to ache, but for once he didn't care.

Without looking up, Donald pulled out the obi. The sash was an exquisite interleaving of browns and blacks, lengthwise stripes of silk with no perceptible stitch. He stretched out one end, and his left hand began to fold the other end in half, making an even edge. He brought it up to his waist in one fluid motion, and began to work the sash into a knot around him.

His worn hands fingered the silk, moved it in practiced motions, and Donald never looked up. He watched as his arms made compact circles in the air, placing the edges and folds where they belonged. His right arm was tossing the end over his right shoulder, and then the left arm was sliding the other end behind

his back. He tossed the right end back off his shoulder and ran it around, circling it to make a perfect knot. He watched himself slide the knot around, to the side, then to the back.

Donald looked at the kimono on his body, looked at the obi, looked at its right angles and crisp lines. His face tightened. His lips felt empty. Hot. His eyes were stinging. He watched the pressed sleeves make wedges against his waist. He noticed the even line that the bottom of the black kimono made, hovering just over the faded carpet. He ran his curled fingers along the opening around his neck, first tracing down one side of the V, then up the other. The hand rested on his cheek. He turned his head again, then turned the rest, wheeling around lightly on his feet. He stood in the open doorway. He wanted them to see him. He wanted them to see his face, his sash. The knot.

In the kitchen, the radio was playing “Sleigh Ride.” Irene was laughing. Jim was crushing ice. None of them heard the sobbing.

