

Santoku

All rise.”

My chest taps grow to thumps.

Treble beats deepen to bass pounds.

My heart’s frustration rapidly grows, suddenly claustrophobic of the small space it’s allotted between these piggish lungs that selfishly fill the cavity underneath my neck.

Breath held; the airbags wastefully underutilize their over-allotted acreage.

The heart elbows recurringly for sufficient space to draw a vast volume of blood in and squash it out.

With the heroic effort put forth, it is confounding why none of the plasma pressed through the tubes capably reaches upward above my neck. This failure permits the natural blush of my cheeks to wipe to pale.

“In the case of the State of New York against Michael Dendron, have you the jury reached a verdict?” The judge’s white hair lies calmly, providing a charismatic contrast to the shiny black robe. His calm voice reveals that the heart within his chest is resting comfortably, snuggled gently with its neighboring zeppelins.

“We have, Your Honor,” the foreman respectfully responds, then gently twists his head to show his eyes my direction. I squint but cannot perceive with certainty if our pupils connect.

He returns to forward position, aimed at the judge’s bench where he is asked, “What say you?”

My eyes close and time stops. My mind sweeps back.

Greased with blood, the knife slipped from my hand while my gaze held locked with the open lifeless eyes of the scoundrel. The metal blade pinged about until settling to a rest on the linoleum.

The large gashes through the white tank top hid in the darkened red blotches leaching through the fibers. The remaining bright white spaces retreated quickly from the attacking spread of crimson discoloration.

His head awkwardly perched just shy of a right angle to his neck, where moments before I had caught notice of the heavily pulsating carotids. The throbbing arteries had betrayed his mind's effort to exude calm, strength, and control.

My approach brought him instant fear, even though he didn't recognize me, having no way to do so. We'd never met in earthly life, but I had the great fortune of coming face to face with the scoundrel many times in my hopeful daydreams. He unknowingly had the great misfortune of dying a gross of deaths in the creativity of my conscious psyche, eyes closed for a clear stage. Each imagined incident enveloped my heart with a great warmth and brought joy, an emotion I'd been stripped of the very day I learned he'd burgled such joy from my little Cynthia.

Oh, my little Cynthia. Before she'd reached a decade of age, the scoundrel ripped youth and innocence from her being to serve his selfish physical needs. The only moments of warmth brought to my soul occurred with each of the scoundrel's dances with death on the stage of my mind.

There were many fabricated paths to his demise. The simple well-sharpened Santoku kitchen knife was among the least exotic. The lasso and drawing into a cliff-hang was among the most dramatic, but also perhaps the least practical. Many other methods competed for the chance to shine but lost out to the Santoku resting adjacent to my right foot in that wonderful moment. Its simplicity and strength won it the right to traverse into the real world.

The furthest edges of my closed lips twisted upwards, bathing in the beauty of the moment and proud of the Santoku's victory. Its strong and unbending steel reached sufficiently forward without becoming burdensome, which the sword of one such murderous imagination would have proven. The choice was right.

My eyes are sliced back open with the foreman's oration. "On the count of murder in the first degree..."

Time halts again. It is a preamble we have all heard many times across plays, movies, and television. Dramatized crime shows build to the verdict as the climax of their stories. The best of directors and writers will elicit a hard heart thump from their viewers and readers. I myself have felt my eyes spread open an extra millimeter, my breath slow and my heart deepen from the anticipation.

I can say unequivocally there is no sufficient technique to impart to you the depth of drum the heart is capable of reaching—the bottom octave perceivable, complemented with reverberation. Surely, a moment after a large firework explodes to brighten the sky, you've felt your chest absorb the shockwave from the distant combustion. That pound is but a fraction of the body's experience when just seconds from a verdict.

"We find the defendant, Michael Dendron, guilty."

My heart's full capacity pound somehow doubles yet again. My fingers don't exist. My arms, my feet, and my legs are not my own. My lungs awaken and reflexively pull the entirety of the courtroom's air inside of me. My lungs and heart battle for space and attention.

"I didn't do it!" explodes into the cavernous courtroom, triggering the bailiffs to rush to Michael and drag him toward the side door to the holding cell. His shouts muffle as he is dragged out and through a hallway.

The double doors to the courtroom push open and I am floated along with the cheering gallery through the opening and below an ornate carving of blind justice.

The sun blinds me momentarily as my body continues to flood forward with the river of grateful spectators. I smell the freedom washing through the air as a gentle spring breeze.

The devil had already accepted the scoundrel as my gift. I am aware of my ghastly cowardice in permitting the bumbling prosecution to follow their error in search of revenge on behalf of the people for such a horrifying stabbing. Why this misfortune befell this Michael, a pure stranger to me, I cannot understand. My voice and confessing raised hand could easily have saved this man from a wrongful verdict.

When my time comes, I believe I shall once again greet the devil. For now, my little Cynthia is safe from the scoundrel and that is all that matters—I tell myself.