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Book Excerpt: My Mother's Donald: The Prologue

He came into the basement through the cellar door and went directly to the gun case over his woodworking bench. He was still wearing his gray jacket and the blue tie with maroon swirls that his wife had given him last year for his new job as the English teacher at Washington Valley High School.

He took the gun down from the case and weighed it for a moment with both hands before he began to load it. He hadn't fired a gun since hunting last fall and before that, well, not since he was a Marine in China.

He closed the cabinet quietly and walked up the stairs. He could hear his mother-in-law in the kitchen, the sounds of dinner preparation. She was getting dishes from the cupboard; the oven door banged, a utensil clattered to the floor.

He had left school early today and gone to walk in the woods again. He'd been doing this more and more recently. Sometimes he told the principal he was sick, but lately, he'd just leave the classroom and walk straight out of the school. Something would come over him when he looked at the young men and girls in his class and he'd get a sour taste in his mouth and then the foggy feeling would come. When he walked in the woods it helped. He'd think about China or try not to think about it, but when that foggy feeling came the pictures would just slip into his vision. He'd see bodies, corpses and sometimes just parts, severed arms and legs. The worst were the babies, limp and dead, sometimes cut in half. It took so much energy to push these pictures away. They seemed to always be on the edge of his sight. If he closed his eyes they stayed.

Sometimes this feeling would creep in when he was in the classroom, sometimes when he brushed against his wooden desk a certain way and the sensation would bring back a memory of the splintering wood box from China. It would flood through his body. He was exhausted from trying to not see and not feel.

In the past week or so, a new thought came with the pictures. It was a confusing thought. He had this idea, it was like a fact, very certain, that his wife was in danger, here in Pennsylvania, not China. What made it more confusing was that he knew that his mother-in-law was the danger. This was very clear. His mother-in-law would yell at him when he came home from school early, "You'll get fired", she'd scream at him. She told his wife that he was crazy.

When she yelled, he got mad, and the pictures would come faster: China, the kids in his class, his wife, dead bodies, his mother-in-law yelling. It was all rolling together.

He couldn't think about this anymore. He had the gun in his hand and he was at the top of the stairs now. It was just three o'clock. His wife would be home in a half an hour. Best to do this fast, make the pain stop. He stepped into the kitchen, his mother-in-law looked up, surprise on her face. She was wearing a yellow apron, holding a mixing bowl; the stove was on, the oven warming up for dinner. She started to look at the clock as he raised the gun and aimed directly at her face. Blood went everywhere.

The sound surprised him but when he looked at her lying on the floor it was oddly comforting. He realized it was familiar. This was the revulsion, the sick feeling he knew from China. He'd felt this when he saw women's bodies on the street in Shanghai; You'd always see more women than men.

The Japanese used to make the men line up in groups so they were all buried or tangled in big piles, but you'd see the women's bodies here and there, in doorways, or in alleys. The worst was just finding arms or legs and no body. Sometimes there would be a body on the side of the road, women cut open with sticks or bottles in their vaginas.

Book Excerpt: My Mother's Donald: The Prologue, continued

He glanced at the clock. His wife would be home soon. He loved her so much. That was all he wanted, to be with her, to be happy, to feel better. He knew that today was trouble. He understood what he had just done, but what else could he do? He knew that he'd have to go to jail. That was another problem: he loved his wife, and he couldn't be separated from her. She needed him; she depended on him. A wave of fear and sadness went through him. She was young and pretty. Other men would want her. She might even want another man. Anger flowed on top of the fear. He bent over and picked up the dishtowel that had fallen near his mother-in-law's body. He wiped the gun.

He took the extra cartridges from his pocket and finished reloading just as he heard his wife come through the front door. She always came in that way, stopping to get the mail from out front. She was in the living room. He met her halfway; he didn't want her to see her mother on the floor and be frightened. He started to cry.

There was no alternative; he knew that. She looked at him and her mouth started to open silently, no words. He could barely meet her eyes as he raised the gun. He fired at her chest and she crossed her arms, almost a gesture of modesty, as she fell backwards. He shot again, aiming down at her heart, his sweet heart. He was crying openly now as he fired more shots at her chest and neck. He could never shoot her head; she was so pretty.

When her body was still he knelt and straightened her dress. He laid the gun on the floor. Then he rose and walked back to the kitchen, avoiding the sight of his faceless mother-in-law. He reached over and turned off the stove. He was always careful; a stove left on could be very dangerous.

He pulled a kitchen chair over to the corner and took the telephone receiver from the wall. He asked the operator to connect him to the Washington County Sheriff. He sat down. Suddenly he was so tired.