

Woodwork

I run my hand over the clean, smooth wood, leaving a fine dusting of pale residue on my fingertips. My sand papering has done the job; the wood is finished to perfection on its large, flat surface. There's something very therapeutic about carpentry, taking a piece of rough, dirty nature and slowly shaping it into something simple, elegant and controllable. Bringing order to an otherwise messy world. I lean my head in close to the wood, sighting down it to inspect the true-ness of the grain. The lines runs away from me, swirling around a knot before continuing their path to the end.

The knot. Always the knot. I used to spend a lot of time trying to make my furniture without knots. I would spend hours trawling the D.I.Y. stores and the lumber yards, trying to find pieces of wood that I could shape without the dirty, ugly whorls distorting the true beauty of the wood. I wanted perfection, but I slowly came to realise that perfection simply doesn't exist. Nature is riddled with flaws, just like man, and you have to learn how to accept those flaws that you can, and control or destroy those that you can't.

I look at my hands. Callused, cracked and worn. Swirls etched through the palms like my own wood grain, twisting and turning like contours on a map. Leylines running cross-wards and downwards, trenches deep in the battle scarred flesh. I've depended on them many a time, and they've never let me down. As you get older, you learn that the only person you can depend on is yourself. You rely on others, and you're setting yourself up for a fall. Or should that be, setting yourself up as a fool?

Kathy. What a bitch. I built us a home. I fed us, clothed us. I worshipped her, would have died for her. Her blonde hair, like a river of sunshine, her smile brightening up the darkest of days. She smelt of freshly cut hay mixed with baking and flowers. A heady mix that would linger in the mind for days. The most beautiful woman I ever knew. And what did she do? Ran off with that fuck Andy. Not a note or a phone call. Here one day, and gone the next.

I stand, stretching my back, feeling the vertebrae pop and crack as I even out my spine. The kettle starts to whistle on the stove, bringing me back to the present moment, leaving my misery in the past where it belongs. I step carefully across the floor, avoiding the tools, wood shavings and rubbish that are spread wildly about the place. Automatically ducking I avoid the low hanging light dangling on its cord, the bare bulb casting a yellowing pall on my skin. I rub my hand across my chin, several days worth of stubble as rough as the sandpaper I had been using. I pour the coffee, stirring vigorously as the granules float to the surface. Fucking instant. It's shit, but it lasts, and I am too far from civilisation to be popping out for fresh coffee every few days. When you turn your back on society (as if there's a choice), you have to make sacrifices.

Staring out the kitchen window, I gaze at the trees surrounding my shack. Dark, dank, and close, they grow tightly together blocking out light and all but the most determined of intruders. As my eyes shift focus, I catch my eye in the glass of the window, and wink at myself. On my cheek a smear of blood looks like war paint. I try to wipe it off with the back of my hand, and now it looks like a child's attempt at rouge. The coffee is still scalding, but I take a deep mouthful regardless, ignoring the bitter taste and the sharp, burning pain. Swallowing, I feel the ball of heat drop down my chest.

If Kathy wants to be with Andy, there's not much I can do about it. He's a no good fat cunt who I am pretty sure molests animals. But if that's who she wants to be with, then who am I to stand in the way? It's the rudeness that gets me. The lack of appreciation for all that I did for her. And in fact, for him as well. Who was it that helped with the roofing on his extension? And sorted out that business with Freddy Malone? And how does he repay me? By running off with the woman I love.

It's no good. I can't keep on dwelling on it. The past is, well it's the past. It's behind me, and I've dealt with it. I buried it along time ago.

I turn back to the room, and smile at the work I have finished. It's one of the best I've ever made. Much nicer than the simple piece I made for Kathy. Well, Kathy and Andy in the end.

I put down my mug and walk over to the corner where I left her. I can't remember her name. I think it was Anne. She was a bit of a screamer, she could really hit those high notes. But in the end she was quiet, like all the rest. I heave her over my shoulder and turn back to the newly built coffin. Lowering her in, a small sigh escapes her, some air just leaking out. A trickle of blood has run from her mouth, and I carefully wipe it away. She looks ... perfect.

Her blonde hair frames her beautiful face, her lips slightly parted. For a moment I think of Kathy once more. But then I shake my head. It's not fair on Anne to sully her with those memories. I take a quick picture, and then slide the lid into place.

As I bang in the nails, I whistle a low tune, my mind filled with images of blonde hair and sunny days.

I wonder who'll join the family next.

The End