

## WOODEN WARRIOR

You are standing in the open doorway to my bedroom, where you have paused to scan the 180-degree view before you, pondering on whether to enter or perhaps turn and leave. For the moment, there is time. You are uncommitted, a situation where the mildest of excuses will suffice should you be discovered.

"I thought it was the bathroom", you may say, but there is something that draws you in, a desire, tempered by the feeling that this is where the cat was killed by curiosity; where the cat saw himself and, in seeing, could no longer keep up the pretence of being a playful kitten. One who responded to the sound of a rattled biscuit box or the 'Pop' of taut silver foil being squeezed into the neck of a bottle of milk; the cat who ran away to wander aimlessly from garden to garden, territory to territory; chased by other cats, stoned by protective gardeners; the cat who became the wandering minstrel, the nomad, who died somewhere in the emptiness of the desert, exposed to the elements of a long cold night.

Perhaps your hesitation is the unfamiliar, the subconscious fear of a sudden, body-blanching bite to the neck from an unseen force that has curled from the crevices of the skirting board or lingered in the shadows and leapt with licentious lust onto its prey.

Is that why you pause? Then have no fear. You have come this far. Step in. Take a long deep breath while you listen to the silence of an empty room and gaze upon the sleeping stillness of inanimate furniture and curios: a stillness that has been waiting for you and knows only me. Relax and exhale slowly with the warmth of invitation.

There is dust. Despite a thousand wipes a day, there is dust, dust and artefacts, memories. The carpet is hard, flattened with the weight of wear, out of place in a bedroom. To the right, you will see a colonnade of cream and mahogany wardrobes leading to the courtyard of my window. Walk round to the far side of the bed, reflect on the view of the valley as you pass, but do not linger. You'll see its image many times on chocolate boxes, or the first developing brush strokes of artistic immaturity.

Move the duvet to one side and sit down. Let your hands fall asleep on top of your knees, while I allow your mind to rest on the blunt rims of bedsprings and see my reflection: a mirror within a mirror. Look at the chest of drawers. See? Can you see a reflection? So I am not a vampire! There he stands, 22 centimetres high, proud, erect, ready for battle, and yet weapon less. A wooden warrior who dominates all he sees: the door, the room, the window, - you?

Here is the treasure recovered from the junk stall of a market place; a treasure that has seen many stalls, century to century; discovered at birth, discarded in death, generation to generation. Age has darkened the brown sheen of his body, unnatural for wood, but built layer upon layer, by the first coats of varnish, the sappy sweat of battle and the soothing smears of admiring hands. His robes mould themselves thickly, around biceps, body and buttocks, as thick marzipan pressed into the crevices of a cake, or amoebic, wet clay suffocating the succulence of a freshly killed hedgehog. Will the cake be cut? The roasting fire lit? So he waits, through the 60-watt seasons of progress. On - off, on - off, breathing the changes of heat and humidity.

Four deep, horizontal gouges cut across the unprotected portion of his body, hacked by a heavy blade or axe. Wounds that remained unsutured then healed to a hard-skinned scar. His pointed Persian hat strikes through the tight, twisted band of cloth around its brim: a restrained penis,

bursting to penetrate the sensuality of a surrogate sun's virginity. There lies his weakness, high and away from the slashing stares of sadistic sexuality.

The raw vertical grain of his face is strikingly sharp in comparison to the rolling folds of his robe and leg linen. There, in the middle of his forehead, an accidental indentation with a cracked, rounded rim, hallmarks of pressure from a small blunt instrument. Was it caused unintentionally, or is it the prize from some distant conflict? The Third Eye?

The face is square cut with a hairless beard that appears to have been harshly hewed and chiselled, by an image-starved sculptor from a lump of igneous rock. Both ears are hidden, so finely tuned that they become brittle if exposed to the bumbling blows of my tired-eyed stumbling to bed, so finely tuned that they can hear the silent screams of a solitary soul, sliding down the dunes of oblivion to the emptiness of a hollow oasis.

A nose that pulls down the bone structured bluntness of burnished brows, to a cliff edge with a sudden drop to lipless lips of a whittled wiry mouth; the alliterator of assonance that has speared through syllables as they grouped and regrouped again.

Do not look into his eyes, not yet. Soak in the smooth stains of his body as it clouds the contours of comatosed chapters, compressed into the bulging bookshelves that afford protection for his back. Knowledge is protection. The greater the knowledge: the thicker the book, but what knowledge?

An oval shield is strapped snugly to his left arm, held close to his heart and lungs, ready to fend and parry a spear or sword, or to be used as a flat club, banged into the bone and gristle of an opponent's nose.

The stub of a nail that once held a spear, projects annoyingly from his right hand and his arm is bent slightly at the elbow, ready to raise and strike with a clenched fist, body lunging from his rigid left leg and pivoting right foot. He needs no spear. It is a fist of strength, a fist of strength and a shield of faith.

Dare you touch his face? He is a hunter! Dare you touch the face of a man who has hunted nightmares among the maze of dark corridors and black rooms of insanity? And how? You would be the first, and the last. Your hands are sleeping. You would need to bring the first twitches of awakening to your fingers and lift them to his forehead, to touch without touching; the hand of fate that he patiently waits for. A war weary wooden warrior.

Are you the one to give him rest? Are you capable of lowering two fingers over his eyes, the ones that guard an empty room and watch the door, the door through which you entered? And having closed the lids on his vision, are you then able to rest your fingers gently on his mouth until the seasons still? For that is all it would take.

Do this. Do this or retreat, close the door and leave the room forever.

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