

werewolf

Everything is neat and tidy. There's dust but it's like a kind of wrapping, soft, as if it's been sprayed over everything, a kind of finishing. The slab-like table underneath the skylight, scarred and mutilated, paint dripped and the wood, hacked at, but ancient damage, an old altar. The vice, jaws clamped shut. I twirl the handle and it opens one centimetre.

The quiet of the place is disturbing. It is (say it) too quiet.

You can hear loud noises softened by being far away, but you can hear them clearly, distinct like you're looking at them in a glass of water held up to the light, and only them and then nothing. Like turning off a series of lights before going home. The quiet descends like darkness and the workshop is still there when I open my eyes.

On the counter behind me, the boxes for screws and nails, separated into compartments for size and type. Two little Pisas made up of six balls of string (different thicknesses) next to a jar full of pencils that have been sharpened with a knife, rolls of sellotape and different coloured tapes: black electricians tape and green tape and blue tape and red tape; tough tapes and then a papery tape that tears easily. He used it once when painting the window sill. Loops of wire hung on nails; the pliers are all hung on nails as well, and his hammers (different sizes) ball head hammers and hammers with forks on them for ripping out nails, a kind of Janus hammer for second thoughts. And his screwdrivers are in a block of wood, sitting waist deep in the holes he drilled. The colours of the handles have the same glossy vibrancy as boiled sweets, red, orange and green, the type we only ever had on long car journeys. Like we only ever ate Maltesers at the cinema.

A notebook made soft and bendy from being rolled up and stuffed into the back pocket of his jeans. The once hard cardboard cover, a marbled pattern and the silhouette of a man posturing, sword held high, has taken on the texture of fabric now.

I flick through it. It is filled with things to do projects and jobs, shopping lists and household tasks. Every page has a date and every task is crossed out in a different colour pen, every job done, every item bought, used, screwed up and thrown away. Until the last page and yesterdays date.

I wish I were dead.

I've only ever seen his workshop from the doorway. He never wanted us in here and he referred to it as his sanctum.

And anyway I was just a girl.

What would I want to do amongst his hacksaws and the floor oil-stained with sawdust spongy underfoot and the merry firework flowers of paint here and there.

Yellow, blue, green, red and white.

It smelled of dad even now. Or at least of smells I'd always associate with him. Cut wood and turpentine. The aftershave he bought in pint bottles off a man from the market. No surprise it lingered. Both fruity and minty. If walls could cough.

But here I am alone.

His soldering kit's put away. The lawnmower in the corner bound up in its own electricity cord. An axe biting into a log. Two handfuls of kindling piled in bundles, wound up with twine. Sprays. Little tubs of varnish and paint with their little one or two lines of lid dribble. The hose pipes live here, the garden sprinkler and a sun lounger that dad was half way through fixing when they came to get him last night. Never throw anything away. Nothing's ever been broken that can't be fixed. Waste not, want not. Never say something original when there's a proverb to hand. How many times have we made do with something ugly for years because dad would keep fixing what mum would keep trying to break. Dad had never understood the idea of a happy fall, a necessary accident, the evolutionary process that happily ruins an unwanted clock, rips an uncomfortable chair, scratches a table that just got in the way.

Dad would take it to his workshop, banging away, the excited sound of the drill going 'wooo hooo' and then heave it back up to be unveiled, patched up, reusable, functioning with the final 'ta-da!' taking the form of a bold statement of the price of the materials used. '£4.75, not including the mirror because I salvaged that off the wardrobe Malcolm was throwing away. And what would that be if we bought it new in the shops?'

'Pretty,' mum would say.

And he'd laugh because he had long ago decided to mistake her contemptuous realism for joshing good humour. It was another of his strategies. Or to use the proper words, another of his lies. How many of those had there been? How much I'd admired him? When I was little, he would grab my ankles in one hand and my shoulders in the other and lift me up over his head in three jerks like he was a weight lifter on *The World's Strongest Men*, and I, a dumb bell. And I'd squeal with delight. Scream. In hysterical danger of wetting myself and his bald patch to boot.

Mum's upstairs now. In the bath, a long bath.

I've always wondered about that.

Mum's obsession with relaxation. Not the 'little book of calm' type. Rather the big book of calm. The encyclopaedia. The tai chi, the fruit, the plenty of fresh air, the meditation tapes, books with titles like *Silver Linings* and *How to Trade with the Undiscovered Country*. I'd just assumed that she was like dad, eccentric. This was her route; the song she sang. Now I wonder. Now I wonder if it wasn't really another way to look the other way. Now I wonder if she knew. If there was

something that he had said that we had never heard, she had seen something that we had never seen. I doubt I'll be the last to think such a thing.

But...

I should hold my horses. I shouldn't rush to conclusions. I can't be certain. Not yet. I can't condemn him. Of course not. But why am I not filled with horror? Why am I not shell-shocked? In a state of disbelief? Why was the first thought through my head when the police arrived with the lights flashing but no sirens, registering a quiet suburban emergency, why did I think 'you took your time'?

Why wasn't I appalled? Angry? Incredulous? There must be some kind of mistake. This is my father. My father.

Admittedly, they didn't say much. They looked around the house. They didn't find his workshop. They were more interested in talking to him. They wanted him out of the house and down to the station. They told us not to touch anything; that they would send somebody this morning. They said that they were just taking him in to help with their enquiries, to answer a few questions. The tall one with the frizzy copper hair which stood up at the sides like two gorse bushes, the top of his head as bald as a knuckle. He spoke to mum.

He said 'Not to worry'.

He said, 'Be back before you know it'.

But his hand shook when he answered his mobile and he spoke in a strange voice, like he was holding his breath. And one of the policemen held dad's arm lightly, so you might not notice if you didn't look at it.

And dad looked happy, the brief moment before they took him away. Cheerful. He looked like he'd been expecting this. I imagine dad would be giving them a full confession. He was always one for fair play. We hated sore losers in our house. He gave up watching football as a matter of fact because he hated the cheats even if they played for Nottingham Forrest. He hated their grousing and complaining, their diving and lack of respect for authority. Never argue with the referee.

I don't think he said 'fair cop'. He was probably waiting until they began to take his statement. He would've wanted that read out in court.

Why do I think this?

My own dad. Why don't I think of something else? Why am I reacting like this and not some other way?

We've all thought about it. We've been encouraged to think about it for almost two years now. The women missing, some of them girls, two of them younger than me. We've been given the instructions by stern men on the news, brusque women with hair that doesn't move and mouths

pinched, even in repose. Don't go out alone. Always make sure people know where you are going and who with and what time you expect to get back. Move in groups. It could be a stranger, but it could be someone you know, a member of your family, a brother, an uncle, a boyfriend, a husband, a dad.

At University we were all given deodorant sized rape alarms which the feminists told us could be used as weapons if you jammed them up into the side of an assailant's head before you set them off. We're not looking for a monster, with horns and a tail, the WPC told us. But of course we were. The fact that they were nice in the day time didn't stop their ability to change when whatever it was in them told them to. The moon, the voices, or just the banality of someone who happened to enjoy it.

Isn't that what monsters are, men who change?

I'd been at sixth form when the first body was found and our dad shook his head over the newspaper and dismissed what my sociology teacher had said about violence against women and the hypocrisy of the media coverage.

'He wants bloody hanging,' he said, and we laughed because we didn't know if he meant the culprit or my much quoted and much maligned sociology teacher, Rod White.

By the time we got to University there was a mixture of hysteria and boredom. It was like the world was coming to an end and that wouldn't have been so bad but it was doing it so slowly, gradually, which I suppose it still is.

We got used to seeing the photographs, always different but always the same. Like different sets of playing cards. Smiling girls with red eyes, heads at an angle, Christmas decorations in the background. One of the girls was holding a cat up to the camera, so close that you could be mistaken for thinking that the monster had taken to killing household pets now. The tearful desperate press conferences, ordinary faces collapsing in grief, people trying to be brave and to plead according to the script, unable to finish their sentences.

'Lucy is a lovely girl and full of life and we appeal to the person who may be holding her to please, to please, to please...' but they couldn't stop shaking because they weren't stupid and they knew that in a matter of weeks someone walking a dog would see something floating in the canal, children playing in the wood would notice a purple toe poking through the autumn leaves.

This man wasn't kidnapping anybody.

So it had crossed my mind and I'd asked myself the questions.

Did I know anyone? What about dad?

Daft but the first thing I thought about were the logistics rather than his character: he didn't have the time, he was so busy. There was his job working at the sweet factory as foreman. His evenings were spent two nights a week at his karate. One night, he would go round to nanna's because she always had jobs for him, instinctively understanding that that would keep her son visiting more regular than any emotional plea for filial attention. Now, he didn't watch football, he hardly ever watched television, preferring a big hard back book from the library, a Wilbur Smith or a Eric Van Lustbader. If he had a big job on, he'd work into the evening. He'd spend his weekends in his workshop as well.

He could've sneaked out at night I suppose, or when we were out of the house.

After all once I was at University, mam had her night school (Greek) as well and her reading group and her tai chi. Now, I think about it, now, I know that there had to have been a way, I can see how I hadn't genuinely thought about it all, I hadn't seriously consider him making time to do these things, to torture and rape and kill these girls.

I hadn't thought of the lies he would tell. I hadn't bothered to cross-check his stories. And anyway. It wouldn't take that much time.

And I wondered what his face might have looked like when he did these things. But I didn't need to wonder I knew.

Upstairs, on the sideboard in the hall there's a photograph taken seven years ago, in the garden. Dad has got me in his grip and is thrusting me above his head like he's the strongest man in the world. His cheeks are puffed out and his head is slightly blurry because he was wobbling but his facial expression is discernable. He's grinning. He's enjoying the effort.

Somehow I know this is how his face looked. Somehow I know that his love for me has something to do with what he has done.

There's nowhere to sit in the workshop. Dad said it's a workshop, a work shop.

And he worked standing up.

So I lie on the hard table, the slab, and close my eyes.

Too tired to cry, I sleep.