

The Wooden Girl's Dancing Dream

for Herry, because we love sharing stories of restoration

Our story has a beginning but that is not where we will start. This time we will enter it at point of broken heart.

This means we meet our heroine lying on her back, buried and forgotten in a pile of bric-a-brac. Her eyes see nothing clearly for jumbled up in dusty sack, there is total darkness round her – proper pitchy black.

This is her story and we'll see it from her view, so there is much which we are presently in the dark about too. How long since she was cleared out from her last owner's room? The nothingness confuses memory and time...

...but hang on what's that tune?

Our heroine is wooden and weighed down by discarded debris, so turning her head is not something she can will herself to do freely. But so strangely hauntingly familiar is the whistled melody faintly reaching her corner that she is compelled to open her ears wider in case it becomes stronger...

... which it does of course by law of science but not enough for her to name the place or the context in which she first heard that refrain.

But as always when music reaches her, her splintered heart responds in war, half of it yearns – believes – she will dance, the other knows it will end as every time before. For she has no power to move her feet or sculpt new worlds with limbs, she cannot move herself at all, so how could she ever begin? The splintered cracks creak still wider, breaking into mocking smile as her heart painfully rehearses what it's heard this last long while. "Whoever heard of wood that moved without a motor's aid?" "Who dares to think toys can decide the purpose for which they were made?" "Do you really believe that you can dance when you don't even have strings?" "And please remember, wooden girl, you are one of life's thrown-away-things."

On and on the silent words accuse with cruelty spoken old but fresh although of course her carved eyes never can grow wet. But deep inside the knots are tense with desperate levels of distress – will there ever be any way out of this latest tragic mess?

The whistled fragment has stopped now, not just drowned out by self-reproach, but thud, pad, thud, pad, by new sounds as booted feet approach. Then no sound but rush of wind and stomach flip as world shakes upside down, then with many other unwanteds she is tumbling to the ground.

As strong, gnarled hands are rifling through all the items, the wooden girl's heart fights between hopeful and half-way frightened. Then she's caught up, held high and clumsily pirouetted round and round – this is more than piqued interest during browsing, closer to long searched for and finally found.

"Who is this man?" she wonders with thumping heart confused, "and why would anyone want a toy so thoroughly outdated and used?" And then the questions begin in earnest bringing doubt to previous hint of maybe delight: "If a grown man is this excited by me, might he just be not quite *right*?"

But then she's listening again to the world outside of herself as he approaches another man who is dusting a high-up shelf. "Oh how much do you want for this perfect, precious treasure? I know her cost is incredibly hard to measure... I'll pay whatever it takes to bring her home from this store, I have such incredible plans to utterly restore... but anyway, sorry, you're busy I can see. It's just I'm excited, I mean, who wouldn't be?"

The shopkeeper descended his metal ladder's few squeaking steps, then said what others less honest might come to regret. "To be truthful good man I'm surprised you're so keen, I can't see at all what you think you've seen. These

days few children want a wooden friend and this one looks close to its very end. Chipped and discoloured, faded, worth next to nowt, to be frank sir I probably wouldn't have bothered to put her out."

There was not really much more breaking that could happen in our girl's wooden heart, so these last insults found nothing left to chisel into, or pull apart. Besides she was still bemused at new realisation taking over old – someone saw her as treasure; she was about to be re-sold! However deluded the mind of the one holding her tight, someone might grow to, might *already* love her – really, they actually might...

And yes it seems it is love at first sight, for the man is insisting on paying proportionately a very high price, and while he negotiates up he keeps on saying, "She really is perfect, a priceless treasure, of course her true worth cannot be measured. I want you to take a sizeable sum to release her from the store, you'll understand when you see her fully restored."

Our next scene takes place at a kitchen table – like the ones you read about in the cottages in fables. The whistling now is not actually humanly made, instead it is coming from the kettle boiling on the old, black range. Then as it fades the old man takes up the cue, and boiling water gushes an accompaniment into tin mug blue.

Our wooden friend is sat up at the centre of the table, drooping to one side, but as straight as she is able. She is propped against a battered jug of daffodils white and yellow, looking across to a corner of the room where there stands a dark-stained cello. Then mug meets table, view shifts and re-shapes, and she's looking again into his crinkly, worn face.

She'd blush if she could, she's quite thrown of guard for no one has studied her quite *this* hard. Head tilted now on one side the penetrating gaze continues, she can almost feel it boring into her little wooden sinews. But he is not looking with criticism in his eyes, rather he still seems to perceive her as some kind of prize. His stare moves to appreciate every last detail of her design, and that's incredibly uncomfortable she's actually starting to find...

For so long she's been passed over, dropped in a heap or left in disdain that she's simply become used to feeling her now-familiar shame. But his eyes are looking way beyond her damage and surface scuff, his smile is saying she's still more than good enough. It's exposing, unfamiliar, to be looked at in this way, she's wondering if it really is such a good day...

But he's grinning now and whistling again and suddenly leaping up from seat and then from the stool in the cello's corner she hears the refrain again repeat. And it's soaring over her in poignant beauty beckoning her to recall when exactly it was previously that she heard that perfect rise and fall. But it's so distant, so buried now in the corners of her mind, that as hard as she looks for it she simply cannot find the original source of its symphonic glory, the point at which it first entered her long, broken story.

Her body is weary, her heart is tired, so although her eyes are painted open, she falls asleep inside...

When the wooden girl is next conscious of her chapters moving on, she has moved location though she can still hear the song. But now he's singing not playing or whistling and she's convinced she's been here before, it's just so distant gone she can't make it out properly or for sure...

She is lying on her back again and there's scent of oak and spruce and pine, and in every direction she sees furniture in various stages of construction or design. There are chippings on the floor; there's sawdust on the bench; and oh dear now, her rescuer's gaze has grown even more intent. She is aware of the focus of his attention shifting away from previous assessment of "perfection". Now she is absolutely, totally sure, he is focused exclusively on her most pervasive flaws.

“Tut, tut” he says and shakes his head as he surveys the work to be done under much better lighting, the wooden girl trembles a little as you might expect; will restoration be terribly frightening?

From head to toe, almost everywhere paint had originally been used, it’s now mostly a reminder of all the years of carelessness and abuse. Cracked, chipped, faded – drawn over in felt tip, every conceivable damage you can imagine, she bears the traces of it. What had once been shiny bright and whimsically charming had become at best in places tarnished and in others strangely disarming. For half her painted smile had been rubbed or scratched off her face and the efforts at previous correction were rather clumsily misplaced. The colour was not right and the angle badly wrong, besides which it clearly extended way too long. And as for her painted shoes, they were chipped almost right through to wooden feet – she looked as if she’d lived for years outside on the street.

The solution was not quick, the repairing far from fun, and it seemed to have lasted ages just seconds after it had begun. It had to happen of course and the man’s hands were kind and gentle but having features sanded away is fairly fundamental. There’s no way round admitting the extreme personal cost, part of her was being permanently lost. She was becoming less; could it ever make her more? And the sandpaper left her feeling nothing less than raw.

There were chemical solutions deeply unpleasant on every pore, and some of them were seeping through unvarnished wood to inner core. Surely it wouldn’t last forever, she hoped to dry out soon; she clung on to her tentative belief she could re-become good as new.

Inside she was still the girl he could see in his mind’s eye, but outwardly there was now little to distinguish her by. For suddenly she could not smile as well as not being able to cry. She had no coloured features left to tell her character by. But still as carved eye hollows focused on kind counterparts above, our wooden girl concentrated on them being rich with real, un-painted love.

And now lying stripped back of compromised outward identity, before he could repaint her she was in for further scrutiny. For there were other significant wounds which had damaged her substance crucially.

One happened some years back now, three owners previous to the last, the fault of a boy whose hands were as slippery as his temper was fast. He had been swinging her around in a tempestuous rage when (actually accidentally) he had flung her like a grenade. She had smacked wood on wood but that wasn’t what hurt most, no the thing that had scarred her was the nail protruding from that post. A deep scar gashed down most of her front – a reminder of the injustice that she had had to bear the brunt of another’s lack of compassion, control and self-restraint, a pattern which repeated so often, it started to feel like fate.

This time she was lifted gently and carried to the plane, she was thankful she could block out its whirl and focus on the refrain. The sensation was drastic but what was fantastic was it was over much more swiftly and she felt light and almost nifty. Her scar was gone, her wood newly shone, she felt she was freshly made...

Wait, what? Yes, that’s it... the meaning of the ditty, *that’s* why he knew how to make her pretty, she *had* been here before.

He was her rescuer and her restorer, he did decide on seeing her in the shop that he adored her. But it hadn’t truly been love at first sight, she’d been here long before this redemptive night. He had been searching deliberately for what he knew he had once lost; no wonder he was willing to pay such a high cost. Perhaps he’d been to thousands of shops across decades of years, all the time dreaming of when they’d return to this room here. For they had been together when she was first formed – he was the carpenter who caused her to be born!

No wonder he had such clear vision, no wonder he could see her without any derision. His was the original design and delight, his was the skill, the purpose, the might to make her exactly how she should be – she was smiling inside though she couldn’t externally.

Deftly he painted and her heart sang along, she was re-created and re-filled with song.

“There you are lovely, just as you should be; let me get a mirror now, so you can see.”

Splintered heart cracks grew closer back till only a trace of hairline, for the sight that met her eyes was very, very fine. He had worked with such care and such artisan attention, she herself had to admit, she could be called “perfection”. But it was not the finished result that was healing her so deeply, that came from the care he was lavishing so sweetly. And also from the song she recalled was hers since the time she was conceived...

the one he composed as he made and sang... till the thief!

She remembered as he pronounced it – her heart united with his voice and in unison announced it:

“At last I can finish you as I always promised I would, at last you can live the dream I gave you that is good. At last my joy in you will be utterly complete, now you are returned to me from that wicked thief who stole you from my bench right before this glorious moment and all it meant...”

The pain was sharp and deep each time. It pierced right through again; again; again. So many repeated times then all was calm. And then... needle and thread were whistling and weaving and poles came over head and she was almost believing...

Feet and hands were moving at last! Elbows and knees were beginning to dance! The movements she longed to make seemed always in line with the expressions on his face. He pulled the strings, but her heart was in tune and ahead and in line, his hands were behind her, enabling her to shine. It was just as she desired and longed for and loved – a duet between the carpenter and his beloved.

And so many things happened at a remarkable pace that made the climax of this story one of beautiful grace. For she knew now the buried longing all those long years was true, she was a marionette – and the Carpenter’s marionette too! She remembered he had wanted her but she was stolen from here, she remembered the source of all that fruitless longing, abuse and fear. She knew now the accusations and mistreatment weren’t his intention, he had always longed to give her full and careful attention. He had made her for himself – made her for his pleasure; she *did* have precious value far beyond all comprehension. She was more than furniture – wood functional, discard-able and ordinary – she was his beautiful playtime companion of choice, utterly extraordinary.

And now every former scar’s splintered echo deep in her heart was completely healed within this newly stunning work of art. And right in the depths of her she knew what she was for and all the last traces of brokenness left her delicate wooden core.

And that is the story of the wooden girl’s dancing dream and the fact that she really was who she always longed to be. But although we are leaving it now, this isn’t the end of the story because she and the Carpenter still dance on in united love and glory.

THE END.