

# The Horror of Decay

A collection of short stories about the decomposition of the physical and metaphysical

## Living Meat

The idea of having a new pet was enticing, but the actual logistics of it was harder than expected. Having to give it Guppy was the hardest part, and watching the pulsating red mass slowly dissolve her into a fine paste broke my heart. But the end justifies the means. I needed her back.

The only thing that bothers me is the smell.

I can't get rid of it. No matter how hard I try to clean. The putrid odor bleeds through the floorboards of my house. Even in my quietest moments, all I can seem to picture is the way it wriggles into my throat, and grasps at my lungs with its rusty nails. No matter how hard I try, the smell remains. I need to do something.

I found a steak knife in the kitchen drawer and made for my living room. This will do. I wrenched the single wooden floorboard in the center of the room. Below laid my pet.

Guppy.

An amalgam of red slivers of flesh and formless pink blobs imitating organs, from which radiated a rotten, putrescent odor. God. It won't leave. It won't leave. It won't leave. My knife plunges into his center. The mass thrashes around. Guppy thrashes. And then, no more. I sob. I sit alone again.

## Desk

Carpentry is a noble pursuit, contrary to popular belief. Sure, it isn't nearly as cerebral or well-paying as a corporate job, but the work can lull you into a peace like no other. Truly, the work of the craftsman is the work of a meditative and focused mind. A humbling activity, and a humbling experience, for a humble individual.

It all starts with setting the mood, maybe putting on music in your workshop while you whittle away the intricate details of your target piece. For me, it has always been smooth coffee-shop jazz, the sounds of which are cloaked in the smell of an imaginary lit candle. Vanilla, strawberry, they bring back fond memories. And then like a craftsman, you get to work. I'll walk you through my process.

I take the wood, I observe it. The lines are jagged and look to be formed like that of spruce lumber, but the content of the grooves are strange. Little gray specks of what looks to be ash sit between the crevices. Dusty piles of gray without pattern dashed across the lumber, wedged in between the natural divisions. The powder itself, oddly enough, looks to pulsate. In and out, in and out. Like the rising and falling of a lung. No doubt a trick of lighting.

I pull it out, and begin to flatten it with my planing tool. To ensure that when fashioned into a furniture item, there are no possibilities of cuts or splinters on the users. To remove any impurities to create a smooth and visually pleasing final product. I begin to buff the lumber. An odd sensation falls over me. Like a prickly sensation all over my fingertips, but also a wet one. Like sticking my hands in the mouth of a moray eel. No matter, it must just be in my imagination. Haven't been getting sleep for a while. But that's ok.

I begin the construction process, gathering copies of that same lumber and fashioning them into a large rectangle with wood glue and sawing. What to do, what to do. This is where improvisation comes in. I picture what I might need. Contract work has been sparse this winter, so I can afford to use my own skills for myself for once. I think of a nice desk. Possibly with an elegant carving design, engraving the table legs with a lovely curved image. Ornate, eclectic, but homely. I start working, making the bland rectangle into a lovely rounded dinner table top.

It's what she would have wanted.

I do the legs next, giving the same treatment to the table top. Carving them down until I feel as if they fit the pattern of the top panel. Then, I assemble, with wood glue and nails the desk is finally complete. And of course, how can it be a good piece if a carpenter doesn't at least test its functionality first.

I place it down in the center of my kitchen, and look at the fridge.

My wife is there.

I pull out her heart and place it in a jar. Just like the day we met in that park. Her hair a lovely shade of auburn, and her eyes radiant like a summer sun.

The bones are always the hardest part to eat and can only be truly used for the marrow, so I had to cremate them in my blast furnace. I can still smell the stench and hear the buzzing of the flies pierce through the air of my cabin, but that problem was solved when I decided I no longer needed my nose.

I deserve to be punished.

I place the jar onto the desk, give it a gentle kiss, and begin to walk to my bedroom.

What remains of her.

The blood.

I walk back into the kitchen.

Why am I in the kitchen? I think I'll start another project. I take the wooden chair off of the door knob to my workshop, and walk inside. I should make something my wife would like. That would be lovely. Maybe a chair.

## Storefront

Odd jobs are a necessary evil.

Maybe you need some extra money to put you off until you get your next paycheck. Maybe you're just in school and need some stuff to save up.

Usually all you need is a quick gig. Do some yard work, walk some dogs, maybe help someone move furniture. None of those require degrees, which makes them awfully accessible, but not everyone is suited for every job. There are some people who find themselves averse to the outdoors, due to allergies or otherwise, who would do well to stay away from any excess exposure. There are also others who find people tiresome, and could quite frankly do without dealing with people's petty annoyances.

I am both. The scorching ire of the sun and the drivel of my fellow countrymen bothers me to no end. In this way I am a very particular person, especially when it comes to my more entrepreneurial pursuits. So when I found a job posting to watch over a clothing store in an indoor mall at night, I was thrilled. No people, no heat, no noise. Just the persistent buzz of fluorescent lights, perhaps the occasional squirrel or stiff wind. Don't really have any major hobbies after all, so this would be a great way to occupy my time.

I stroll past rows upon rows of mannequins posed in different positions. Some shifting their weight from leg to leg, others simply standing up straight like bellhops at an expensive hotel. I never understood the stereotype of mannequins being creepy, if anything I find them very appealing. The form of a human without any of the emotions that come with the real thing. I myself prefer a minimalist, stoic life approach, and quite frankly do not care to deal with more than I have to. I have my apartment, I have my money, I have my TV, and I go to the gym sometimes.

My train of thoughts is broken when I come across one of the mannequins. It has fallen over. Pity. Where's the confident stance? I chuckle to myself. A joke only I would ever get. I picked it up, after all I don't want my pay docked for damaged property. I look at the stand to see if there is anything wrong. Nothing of note. Nothing broken.

I spoke too soon truly. The lights are rather abruptly shut off throughout the store. The only one that remains is the one that sits above the door to the breakroom. I walk inside and locate the fuse box. One of the switches appears to be flipped. I flip it back and the lights turn back on. Maybe it's an automatic system or something.

I twist the door handle and it gives me some difficulty. It won't budge. It's not like I locked it, did I? I turn around to see if I have anything I can break it open with.

Another doorway.

This one gives me no problems.

I open my eyes. People walk around the mall. I hear them chattering. Talking. Staring in through the window past me. One of them reaches for their phone.

An hour passes.

Paramedics cart someone out of the store, a blanket draped over his body.

I overhear mentions of an accident. Something about "slipped" and "shelves"

Minutes pass. Then hours. Then months. People start going to the mall less and less. A mother and her daughter grow up. The daughter comes with her own children. They place their hands on my clothing, but I feel nothing. Many more come after that. Memories made and memories vanished.

I suppose I got too comfortable. I don't know how long it's been, but a demolition team arrived today. They decide it is time to close down the mall. I hear a large boom as they bury the store under mountains of rubble. As the ceiling above me caves in, I fall over rather unceremoniously onto the cold hard floor. I begin to feel a weight pressed upon me. My oxygen supply wanes, and a burning sensation fills my lungs. With every second that passes, the pain makes itself known, until I can feel nothing but needles inside and all over my body. My vision is the next to go. My body fills with an intense static, followed by a continual high pitched ringing. The pain returns again. Tiny scalpels investigate my body like fire ants. My skin feels like it is melting off, stripped from the bone like meat from a tender morsel, falling off in painful, horrid clumps. Now nothing but cold. Painful, biting cold.

There is nothing more for me to look forward to. Only my mind, the pain, and the prospect of whatever hell awaits me after this.