

## The Wee

He had always hated people from the countryside. They were either too poor to move, or too stupid to be miserable. Yet here he lay, in his late in-laws' bedroom, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by birches and bumpkins.

He was contemplating the history of the room. Events that had taken place in here, what a massive impact on his life they'd had. A small smile crossed his lips. The yellowed old panelling had observed a lot. They would have to be one of the first things he tore down. There weren't much he would save in the old home. When they'd first gotten the keys, all his instincts told him to sell right away, not set another foot inside, but then the price of electricity shot through the roof, inflation hit and the market ran dry. The house couldn't be sold this year. So reluctantly, they'd taken it, agreeing to redo everything and sell at a healthy profit when the market stabilized.

The first thing she'd done was to leave the country. Apparently, she needed a weak abroad, "alone with her grief." So here he lay, alone, trying not to think about his wife's conception, and failing.

Sleep had always come easily to him. He never thought much when he went to bed, back in the city. Here, though, there was something unsettling him, something that kept his mind racing. The bloody panelling! Why was nothing in here painted? Every knot and stain in the wood was an imperfection, glaring at him. It was too honest, daring him to get out of his shell and let go of the comfort of hiding his flaws. He missed the city and the people in it. Every one of them, like him, was depressed and scared, but hid behind smiles of bleached teeth, their haircuts and suits, an impenetrable armor, an extrovert disguise for introverts, safe in its shared falseness. There were no armors out here. Every knot and stain displayed proudly, the extrovert disguises, just clothing, scary in its honesty.

He missed their apartment too, clean walls, straight angles and art that wasn't faded or painted by some late relative. They had a kitchen where everything worked, and when they cleaned it, it really felt clean. And the bathroom, tiles that weren't yellow.

There it was. You can only lay in bed for so long, trying to sleep, before you have to pee. Not badly, but once you've felt a little touch of pressure, it's too late. You can

stay in bed for as long as you like, but it's a losing battle, might as well get it over with.

Reluctantly, he got up, floorboards creaking as he went for the door. Upon touching the cold brass of the handle, he was reminded of the dreadful insulation of the place and went back for his robe. The bathroom was on the ground floor after all.

The hallway outside was cloaked in darkness, except for a beam of moonlight shining through the window above the stairs, which gave the ornaments and the wooden figurines a distorted look. In daylight, the house felt so warm. The colours were warm, and it had a homely feel to it. In the dark, though, it matched the coldness of the air perfectly. He'd prefer to keep it warmer, but the electricity. He wasn't made of money.

A carved owl gave him a stern look as he walked towards the stairs, and he felt a sudden urge to turn on the lights, but the impractical old house only had a switch downstairs. Carefully, he started the descent down the needlessly steep stairs. Every step gave a different kind of squeak. A chill, but gentle breeze swept up under his robe. The insulation really was awful.

As he descended into the darkness, a knot was tightening in his chest. Something inexplicable, a feeling that something, other than wooden figurines, was watching him. He gave up all pretence of calmness, picked up the pace and ran down the rest of the stairs. The light switch was just in front of him. He threw himself at it.

A bare light bulb flickered, then went out. An old fuse, probably. He could hear his own heavy breathing as he rushed through the hallway, passing the doorway to the kitchen. Had he seen something, in the corner behind the fridge? Should he check? No, it was irrational. He entered the small toilet, whispered a short prayer and flicked the light switch. The room was bathed in warm yellow light. The knot in his chest was banished by the glory of it. Relieved, he cast a quick look over his shoulder, pissed, and then went back to bed, leaving the light on.