

There was a small house across from the primary school .With four white washed walls, a terracotta roof with a chimney coming out of it, and two windows on the sides of a door, like the drawing in a child's note book. Along the outside was a garden, with bushes of marjoram manicured and cared for over many seasons. During the day a canary in a cage was hung against the white-washed wall, it sang to longing and solitude. The walkway outside the door was unpaved put swept, and an outside toilet was clean for anybody to use. The inside of house was partitioned in two, on one side was a kitchen, on the other was a sitting room divided by a curtain beyond which was a bed. The sitting room was furnished with a table and three chairs, a low cupboard and a wooden bench, above the wooden bench a window faced a sandy road where children played. The little house stood awkward among the tall, modern buildings. It had stayed the same while everything around it had changed. It had been home to the woman who lived in it from when she was born.

The old woman sat in a chair at the window and watched the children playing, turning her deaf ear to her companion. He talked insensately whenever he was not sleeping. The old people's own children had immigrated to places across the sea and around the world. Their grandchildren were now young adults. One day a granddaughter came to visit them from overseas. She had not grown up near her grandparents and was curious about her heritage.

They had a lunch of Cod-fish with spinach and fresh cream cheese. After lunch while her grandfather rested, the grandmother sat at the table, she rolled a cigarette and looked out the window. The granddaughter got up from the table and sat on the attractive two seater bench. It was made of polished red wood. It had sturdy armrests, a curved spindle back, and a solid seat that was covered with brightly colored, woolen, knitted cushions. It was comfortable and, the right size for her body, she rested her hand on the armrest and appreciated the smoothness of its age. She snuggled into it and recognised a mix of melancholia and nostalgia coming up in her, it occurred to her, that these feelings were seeping into her from where she was sitting. She asked her grandmother about the origin of the bench, and drifted into an unusual sleep, it was state of not quiet-wake and but not fully asleep. She was not surprised, when her slumber became entangled in words, and a story emanated directly from the settee, into her reclining form.

"A few shavings will need to curl, before we unravel this carpenters tale. I was manufactured in the Capital of a once great empire, in a proud military workshop. It happened at a time when soldiers were shipped abroad to protect the Empire, some were killed, and retuned in in the iced hulls of transport ships, the remains of the dead packed in hardwood crates. When this grim cargo was brought ashore. The deceased were dressed in in regal uniforms and transferred into gilded, polished coffins, then they were honored with full military burials.

It was in the far corner of a walled quadrangle at Military Headquarters that the discarded wooden carcasses had been piling up. Captain Silva was assigned with clearing the overflow of this embarrassing refuse. He analysed the problem, and after examining the crates, he observed that even though their outside was grey and dull from travel in a maritime element. The insides of these funerary empties were rich and vibrant. This stark contrast invaded his imagination, he was captivated by the live colours he saw, mahoganies dripping with red, wild pear grains shimmering with a deep honey wave, and veneers of the darkest walnut with crushed olive coffee swirls .To resolve the situation, he put his credo into practice. Turn all obstacles to one's advantage. The solution was simple, repurpose the timber into functional items. He would nurture his aspiration as a draughtsman, summon bold and defined lines, and make drawings of movables. Furthermore, he would commandeer the underutilised

wood workshop towards the project. He had the methodical patience of the military trained and he set out to accomplish his goal, to clear the quad of the crates, and if was cautious and discreet in the process he would acquire some well-made furniture. His first step was to find a skilled cabinet maker.”

The granddaughter roused from her voyage fascinated by the lucidity of her conscious dream. It became a pattern, that when she returned to visit her grandparents, the old women would sit at the table watching and listening to the life on the street, while a narrative leaked from the bench where the granddaughter sat.

“The story of my creation involves love, it is the kernel of my conception. I will present Antonio, my cabinet maker; with laughter, amongst music and festivities. I will assume that the lovers met, at the street fete of the Patron Saint of Marriage. We can imagine her, young and smiling , watching him playing trumpet in the March of The Single People, and him, admiring her dancing beneath an arch of brightly coloured paper flowers. We can see them as they stand in line for a grilled sardine, waiting bread in hand. Their naughty eyes meeting, their eager bodies pushed together by the crowd, him making space for her billowing skirt, and she touching the braid of the sleeve of band uniform . They would speak with intention, as if they were preaching to fish, and even before they sat on the side walk to eat their fragrant meal, they would have fallen in love. The following year at the same feast they were part of a mass wedding ceremony. They accepted the Saints miraculous volition, that had brought them together. They move into the little house, close to where Antonio worked in the ship yards. By the time of fete come around the following year, Martha’s belly was swelling, from the love that they had share in their curtained bedroom.

Shortly after the baby was born, Antonio received an order to present himself at the fort, he was being called to go and fight in the colonies. Martha would not have it, she did not want to be left a widow with a baby , so she did research and found out that there was ,a concession offered to men who were married with children, that would allowed them to do their service close to home. They filled in the prescribed forms and payed for the necessary legal stamps, Antonio took his application to the Fort, in it he included, a letter from his employer, the well-known and respected Shipwright Sabino. Master Sabino vouched for his character and skill as a woodworker As a result of this recommendation Antonio’s case found its way to Captain Silva’s desk. Through the action of Marta’s love My Designer and My Maker were brought together.

Private Antonio was given dispensation from service abroad and stationed at the woodwork shop in the city barracks. A respectful period after the funeral of The Fallen Heroes, Captain Silva called Antonio to his office and laid out his plans for the coming months. At his desk they schemed over drawings executed by his own immaculate hand. They agreed on schedules and made production arrangements .It was decided that Antonio would start with a Lovers-Bench, an occasional chair that would sit two comfortably near to each other. In between his Fort maintenance duties, Antonio was to process the discarded crates. He would carry them into the workshop, dismantle them and grade the wood, sorting it according to species, size and serviceability. He was to keep a tally and record the stock in a triplicate inventory, one copies to be submitted to the office the other two to be kept in the workshop. The timber was to be stored in an orderly manner, with provision for aeration. “

The Granddaughter woke refreshed from her siesta, as if she had swam in the sea. She told her Grandparents that the Love-Seat made her remember memories that were not her own. The old people found this amusing. Her grandmother said to her.

“The Love-Seat has always been here, my mother told me that your great grandfather, Antonio, made it. I never met my father, they said that he died from a splinter, when I was still a baby in my mother’s arms. I do remember how she would sit, like you doing now, and how she would sob herself to sleep, I asked her why she cried, and she would tell me it was the lonely love seat that made her do it, now I know that she was suffering with longing for her husband, but when I was a little girl I really believed that it was the Love – Seat that made one cry, so all through my life I have gone there weep, as a child over broken dolls or lost trinkets, and as a teenager I wailed over my first broken heart in that very space, not to mention the time your Grandfather was away playing music with the Roma for three days. Your mother also sat on it, but she was never one for crying, I think she wiped her tears elsewhere. I hardly sit on it anymore, except when I get the insomnia, then I remember things that I don’t want to forget, and I have a good old cry, I feel like I’m a little girl in my father’s arms and then I fall asleep.”

The granddaughter visited one last time before going back overseas, after lunch she sat at the table with her grandmother. The old woman pulled out a packet of tobacco and showed her granddaughter how to roll a cigarette, they looked out the window, enjoying the muted music-like sound, children at their games, then once more the granddaughter succumbed to the Love-Chair’s embrace and the impression of its whisperings.

“How far does one have to travel to reach a source? If we could only have found the finial of that splinter, there would have been no sepsis. All the way to the contemptible ligneous shards birth, I will start with one true thing certain that at some point there is a meal.

Antonio cleaned the last of the gravy from his tin plate with a crusty piece of bread, and he washed it down with a remaining swig of wine. He put the fruit of the day, in his pocket and after clearing his plate, He went outside to eat his orange next to the rough coffins in the sun. He cut open the orange and the juice dripped and made his fingers sticky. He stood next to the boxes that were piled high. The warm midday sun on his back, he looked closely at the unplanned wood that was at eye level, and touched with his sticky fingers. He leaned closer to identify the wood, careful not to topple them, and peered inside into the gloom, the pungent smell of carrion slapped his face, an odour of death and decomposition leaked from the box, reeling, he steadied himself against the mound of crates, instinctively reaching for support. Released by the pressure of his push, a sharp splinter speared the palm of his hand. A spot of hurt pierced the surface of his skin and bolt of pain shot up his arm, through his shoulder, and into the ventricle of his heart. He dropped the remaining quarter of sliced orange and his penknife to the cobbled floor. He brought his hand up to his face and looked for the sting, he saw the end of it, like a fleck of black pepper on the landscape of his palm, he pinched it out of its the pinprick. The course of poison was instant and he swayed with a flush of heat, in that instant, he had a vision of a toppling tree. He stepped back and shook his head, unnerved. He set his feet firmly on the ground to recover his balance, then he bent down picked up the knife and the orange, Pausing to glare at the stack of empty coffins, the palm of his hand throbbing and the memory of the smell of rotting bodies smeared on insides of his nostrils. He folded his knife and walked back to the workshop eating the last of the orange. He had not removed all of the splinter, and the tiny germ became the beam that poised his blood.

His hand got progressively worse, he ignored it in hope and ignorance. He continued dismantling the crates and storing the wood, marveling at the richness of the wood, the thickness and straightness of the planks. Captain Silva was around, sometimes casually, sometimes curiously looking into the open gate, at other times he would make closer inspections and scrutinise the quality of the workmanship. They would eye me up close, turning their heads at an angle to scrutinise the joints, they would run their fingers along the sanded surfaces of stroking me as they would a beloved, and thus Antonio reached the height of perfection in his craft and Captain Silva a manifestation of stability and confidence in his being. I was made with the eyes of a captain and the hands of a lover who was about to die.

I was already varnished and dry when Captain Silva arrived at his office one morning and his adjutant was waiting with the news of Antonio's sudden death, the medic ambulance had been called in to recover his body, and a post mortem was under way. A chill concern was running amok in the barracks. Rumours that an infectious disease was active in the wood from the crates, spread as if it was the virus itself. Major Aquino was called in from leave to take control, he initiated an investigation. The workshop was quarantined, and the mound of boxes was cordoned off. Captain the Silva was called into the Majors office and he was questioned about how the wood had been disposed of. The inventory accounted for the planks in the workshop. A guard was put on duty outside the workshop. Captain Flavio from the medics made an inspection of the timber, and collected samples from random planks. They were put in labelled envelopes, and couriered to the university laboratory, where they remained. The autopsy confirmed that the remains of wood in the deceased's palm, was the cause of the infection, and his death.

Upon closer investigation of the workshop Major Aquino found me, the Settee, shiny and ready for delivery, linking me to drawings and schedules signed by Captain Silva. He was aghast that the crates used to transport dead heroes should have been used for a personal project at military expense, his disgust lingered like an odour that could not be shaken off. He questioned Captain Silva again; under whose authority did he make the decision to use the timber, and for whom was the settee manufactured. Captain Silva was charged with irregular conduct. The tribunal, found the Captain guilty of inappropriate use of military facilities, and operational irregularities. As a disciplinary consequence he was relieved of his post at the fort and dispatched on a tour of duty in the colonies.

The tribunal ordered the crates and timber is to be burnt. Antonio was buried in the military cemetery but without honors or fanfare. Major Aquino requested that I, the Settee, be sent to the widow, as a show of condolence, it also solved the clerical problem of accounting for un-commissioned inventory.

Two young men in military uniform carried me to Martha's house and knocked at the door. , she opened, straightening her mourning dress, held on to the jamb to steady herself .

"Yes?" she said

"Good Morning ma'am, Special delivery from Major Aquino. Could you sign here please? Thank you"

He hands her a pen, holding a clip board, and pointing to a blank line at the bottom of an official looking form.

'She writes her name, and asks "What Am I signing for?"

“This Love –Seat. “He says

“Where should we put it? “

Martha steps inside and pushes a clay pot of Marjoram from beneath the window, she indicates with her open palm towards a patch sunlight shining beneath the open curtains. They put the furniture down, and nodding their heads, and leave as if eager to finish some unpleasant deed. The baby cries from the next room she goes and fetches her, they sit on the Love-Seat, both crying.””

Not long after the Granddaughter returned to her home, the grandparents died, first the one and within eight hours the other, they were buried next to each other. The little house now empty of it's people, caved in on itself and developers occupied the lot to build a high rise, as for the Love –Seat, because it was manufactured with devotion , that it still holding the forlorn.