

Carpenter

By Sean Beckett

They say that Jesus was a carpenter
that he spent the time between Bethlehem and his thirtieth birthday
cutting planks and feeling the grain of wood.
They say that Jesus was a carpenter.
Was he a good one?

Did sweat ever drip off his long nose
or get in his eyes,
Did he have a beard
Did it get in his way.
Did he ever hit his thumb
or measure wrong?

or

Did boards bend at his touch,
could he sand with his palms
Did angels hum along the arc of his hammer,
Did the rhythm of his strokes pull the tides in to shore?

Did he call out the names of the trees as he worked
did he sing the stories of how they fell
did he understand that when a man asked him to build a bed big enough for two
he was praying for his wife to love him
did he bless that bed
did he kneel by every chair and teach it how to hold.

Did he build a house as he would build a sermon,
Checking every line of oak, every length of scripture,
each board a story, every verse a support—
Fitting the walls together, kissing every corner with his fingertips
always leaving the outline of a door?

When he walked away from his dusty workshop on the first day of the rest of his
life
did he preach with a voice thick with sawdust
Did he reach, with shoulders that knew how to pull a saw straight
Did he sit and talk with the firm back of someone who knew what work meant?

I tried to make a bookcase once but I was too timid.

I was scared of splinters
the discomfort of imperfection

the uncertainty of stability

so

I gave up.

I told myself I was cut out for something else,
that there are people out there that can do that kind of thing for me,
and it was only going to fall apart.

Is everything he made gone?
I haven't heard of anybody who has found an old oak desk in their grandfather's
attic
and claims it was made by the son of God
so
they must have all broken, at some point.

That bench made for Jairus cracks at one end
the bed he crafted for a man named Thomas sags.

Somewhere in Nazareth a table stutters and falls, a chair rots, and crumbles.

Did he think about that as he walked, two final pieces of wood on his shoulder,
Did he picture every piece of furniture he ever built

could he feel them in his mind?

Did he know the hour and season when they would disappear?

And when they put the first nail against his artery
Did he notice

that it was held just a little bit off center
When they raised the hammer did he know

from experience
That the first blow would cut just a little bit sideways?

And when they were done

nailing him up there

did he look down and realize
that they had done what he could not.

They had built something

that could last
forever