

Wedge

She looked up to see the sky because the redwoods were so dense that only by looking up could you get a sense of the weather. And the weather had been so screwed up. The seasons had gone wacko. It was the middle of July and it looked like the dead of winter. It felt like a big storm was coming in but she had no way of knowing. She never read the newspapers that she piled up on the dining room table with the mail, in a pyramid, nor ever watched or listened to the news. Reality TV and Rap music were her only weather vanes. Her parents had left her to take care of the house and animals, traveling to Italy for needed marital repairs. She felt a bit abandoned. They had been married over 20 years. What was the big deal? If you didn't know someone by then, well, you might never. You might never know.

After she attempted suicide in the spring, then being held in a psych ward lock-down for a week and subsequently dropping out of the scholarship college, coming home had not really felt the same as before. The meds and the therapy were inconsistent, if not placebo. She settled into day-to-day complacency, where the days melted into weeks without resolve or remorse. She could not believe that her parents would leave her here at home, alone. What if, what if? She could not be trusted, could she, with the responsibility for her own life? She had tried before to end it. Why if not here now, with her parents half a world away, was not the perfect time to settle her fate.

She was hungry. They had been gone 3 weeks now, leaving money for her to go food shopping. But she hated the stores and how they sized up the food you bought. And she would rather do without than having to buy tampons. They would know. Shopping became a walk of shame she tried not to do. She was putting the cheddar on the last piece of sourdough when the lightening and thunderclap resounded. The lights blinked, but did not go out, but she knew that it might not be long before she was without TV. And heat. She had made many fires before but her parents had always had the wood stacked ready to go with plenty of kindling wood. But this was July. She went out to the wood porch and saw there was still a small amount of kindling, but only a few pieces of split wood ready to burn. Stacked in the corner were perhaps a dozen 2-foot rounds of oak, not yet split. Ever since she was little she had watched her dad split wood with a wedge and sledgehammer. These early visions of his strength and might had held her in awe. Her father, like a sweating locomotive seemed to have never-ending energy to take something big and make it smaller. He would come in laughing and smelling of beer. She was comforted by him and scared at the same time.

She was proud of the fire she had started, while outside the rains became torrential. See, she did not need them, her parents, but missed them mostly for wanting to show them the fire she had made. "Why can't they be here when I need them?" But if the weather continued in its tirade she knew she would need more wood. History showed that the power would go down. She layered up with sweatshirts and went out to the wood porch where she had watched her Dad split wood. She shivered as she stepped outside the door. She reached back inside to turn on the lights and suddenly she felt as if she was stepping onto a stage. There were the rounds of Oak over on one side and the sledge, wedge and axe in the other corner. The wind and the rain sounded like applause from a dark audience. She thought it was so negligent of them to leave such implements of destruction for her possible imperilment. What were they thinking? "I could kill myself so easily." Then she thought about the sharp kitchen knife she had used for her sandwich. "I guess they hadn't thought of that either."

She toppled down a big round off the stack and it rolled a bit, scaring the cats huddled in the corner. She toppled it again flat, put the wedge in the center and tapped it gently, holding the sledge up the neck towards the head. The next part she knew would be harder. She had watched her Dad take full roundhouse swings with all his might, but she knew she wasn't ready for that, yet. She took a little baby swing and hit the wedge dead on, but it didn't budge much, if at all. So she swung the sledge down as hard as she could and it missed, completely bouncing off the round of wood. The wind and rain seemed to hesitate and she looked around as if someone was watching. "Damn!" she said and took another swing at about 75%. "I'm down!" she yelled as the wedge went in about an inch. She swung back again full bore and buried it another inch or so. "Shit!" I don't need them. Here we go." And she continued to hit the wedge precisely and accurately, time after time, with renewed vengeance, until it was buried in the Oak round. The rain was coming in almost sideways, into the covered porch and getting her wet. "Fucking bastards!" she said running back inside to find a waning fire. "OK, OK" she said trying to calm herself. Her anxiousness was not placated by her bi-polar pharmaceuticals, taken two hours before. She remembered her Dad cursing when getting a wedge stuck and then using another wedge to unstick what he had stuck.

Outside she found another wedge, which she picked up and held to her heart. "With this wedge I'm at the edge." She placed it and tapped it the same way she had started the stuck one. "You think I'm helpless, you'll see. I'll split this and be warm again. I don't need you. I can do this by myself."

She pulled back on the sledge, took aim and swung and swung until the second wedge became just as stuck as the first one. She was beyond belief. She fell to her knees and began to sob on the altar of the oak round. "This isn't fair. I've done everything right. I should have been able to split that in two." Lightning flashed and thundered almost at the same time as the lights in the house flickered and went out. Still sobbing she went back in. She wasn't cold any longer, probably from swinging the sledgehammer. She went into her room, locked the door and got into bed, her tireless friend. She fell asleep.

The next morning she was awakened by the sun on her face and the sound of the TV that was on in the den. The power must have come back on. She got out of bed, sliding into her fuzzy slippers and walked out onto the wood porch. The cats meowed for food. Looking around she saw the trees still dripping in the bright sunlight.

Birds were chirping and the ravens were clucking and bantering in the meadow trees. She looked down at the oak round with the wedges still stuck deep. She felt somehow different now. The sun was hot on her face, she wasn't cold and there wasn't any need to split that piece of wood. It seemed to her unsplitable. Today would be a good day and not only that her parents were coming home.

She decided that instead of driving up to get the newspaper she'd walk, something she never did. As she walked she reflected and realization overwhelmed her. She felt as if someone had snapped all her bones, in fact, her entire being, back into proper order. Her smile grew and filled her with contentment.

She grabbed the newspaper and began walking back down the quarter mile road to the house. Usually she never opened the newspapers, leaving them rolled up, stacked on the dining room table. But today was different. She had wonder and life back in her heart. She rolled the rubber band off the end and it sprung into the berry bushes where the quail lived. She opened the paper.

Alitalia Flight Missing Over Atlantic 323 Presumed Dead