

The Worker

by David Shroyer

The saw blade takes small bites with every pull. The red-white fibers spray back and forth with every push and pull of the handle. Snap! The limb breaks off from too much pressure. *Damnit*, he thinks. That happened to half the limbs he cut today. He is doing a sloppy job, but he only has a little more to do. He grabs for the last limb and starts to go at it. It only takes a few seconds for the blade to find its groove—it always does. How long had he been doing this, and he was still the low man on the crew? He wants to do what the older guys do. He wants the other guys' job: the more important gig. They would come in first, like they were important or something, and whack away all day. Then he would come in, cut everything up, clean up their mess, and make everything look pretty.

“Hey, Blake. You almost done over there?” his boss shouts.

Blake? Why did everyone call him by his last name? Every crew he had ever been on, they would always call him by his last name.

“Yeah boss, I'm about done,” he retorts quietly.

He is about halfway through the last limb; he knows this because the color and fibers of the mist change from reddish-white to yellowish-red. The middle was always the worst part to cut through. Not because it was hard or anything, but because it always seemed to take the longest after he got to the middle. Also, in his haste to cut all the way through, he would put too much down-pressure on the side he was holding and snap through, leaving a rough and jagged edge. It really didn't matter though—it just didn't look professional like that. . .to him at least. He knew it would all get destroyed. After every time he would break one, he would tell himself to slow down. The workload would never stop. After this job they would just head to the next: it never ended.

His boss would always harp at him to take pride in his job. He has been, but he hasn't got many advances for his efforts. That's why he has been jumping from crew to crew. He always feels like he is under appreciated and underpaid. He can't keep living on these wages for very much longer—he has kids to think about, a family. If he had a higher up position he would get a raise, but he's been waiting for a long time and gotten nothing.

“Wait until someone leaves and a spot opens up, then we'll get you right in.”

How many times had he heard that one? He could do their job. Actually, he likes watching the other guys work, with their pride in “taking another one down.” Watching them hit the ground always gave him chills. The other guys never mess one thing up, and nobody on the crew ever gets hurt. He could do that, but that's something he always thinks about, the danger. Even though he likes the work, sometimes he thinks about a different occupation. Even though he's a little peon, he still has a dangerous job. What if he got hurt—who would take care of his family? His crew? Yeah, right.

He gets down to the last strokes. This is when he needs the finesse of a woman—soft and easy strokes, and a light grip. He isn't going to break this one, not this time. He slows his strokes down and eases up on the pressure. Tink! He feels the saw blade cut clean through the bone. He smiles. The sinewy tendons pull and push with the blade. They always get caught under the notches, but he can't just rip it off: he's got to take pride in his work.

With the last few strokes through the flesh, the tendons sever and he slices the skin like bologna. He tosses the arm into the bathtub, drops the bloody saw on the plastic tarp, and walks over to the chemicals. He looks them over carefully, scanning them cautiously. *Sulfuric or hydrofluoric acid*, he thinks to himself. He looks back at the tub to see if it's porcelain or cast-iron. The claw feet of the tub indicate cast-iron. Half these chemicals will eat right through a porcelain tub and clean through the floor. He slips on black, glossy, industrial rubber gloves and grabs the hydrofluoric acid and walks casually to the tub, flips the cap, then slowly and methodically pours the acid in. Instantly he smells the chemical going to work: the acrid stench of the corroding flesh flows up his nostrils. *Damn!*—he forgot a mask. He cranes his neck back to avoid the solution's intoxicating power until the bottom of the tub is coated with a frothing soup of torso and limbs. It doesn't take much for this stuff to work. It will eat through anything.

As he hovers over the bathtub watching the acid work, he thinks about asking his boss one more time about a raise or a promotion. He can't keep doing this for chump-change. You would think working for the mob would pay better. If he doesn't get a raise then he might quit this time. He could probably find a job were he could utilize his skills. It might be a slight pay cut, but he could at least advance with his kind of aptitude. What could he be? A carpenter. . .no, a lumberjack.