

The Charcoal Burner

Synopsis

The Charcoal Burner, JACK, lives at the edge of the birch forest with his cat RUBY and his white shire horse MARY, gathering and preparing the wood for the slow process of making charcoal. He is a true loner, either working on his fire or writing books of Holy poems; images and words excavated from his forgotten past.

One day JACK sees a woman, around his own age, HEATHER, moving in at the top of the hill next door to a derelict house. Living in a caravan, visited rarely by her only friend PAUL, HEATHER begins to knock the house down, by hand, with a sledgehammer. From the rubble she builds a series of walls, beautiful and maze like, transforming the ugly and dank house into patterns of her own order. As HEATHER works she has strange visions of a girl, about 6 years old, always sitting and waiting.

THE HOUSE, already a sinister character in the story, takes on a new and almost evil atmosphere. It is a dark shadow that looms and stares at its guests and viewers alike; damp with a painful past and many secrets.

MR STANTON is the old man who she bought the house from and through his interaction with HEATHER, and her visions of the young girl; we sense there is a dark and sinister history between MR STANTON, HEATHER and the HOUSE.

The Charcoal Burner and HEATHER become friends and they talk their talk, drinking tea and generally disagreeing on most subjects.

One day as JACK has his horse shod he asks his blacksmith to brand his arm. A nihilistic act that for some reason JACK needs to do. Reluctantly, the blacksmith obliges. In the fire and pain of the branding, the past of the Charcoal Burner is unlocked and he realises how much more he knows about MR STANTON, HEATHER and himself.

HEATHER'S visions now encompass the spectres of a GIRL and a BOY and the abuse MR STANTON forced upon them as children. . . They plot a revenge.

Revenge occurs, but not in the cold blood of a planned murder, but one night, as HEATHER sees the boy and girl hiding in the dark corners of the derelict house. Sledgehammer in hand, disturbed by the wandering MR STANTON who had molested her and JACK as children, she beats him to death.

MR STANTON is burned to ashes in the charcoal burner and his remains are buried in the foundations of the house.