

Kathleen Spivack

LADY CARPENTER

All winter I spent on carpentry,
putting our new kitchen in.
Though I hammered, the wall board
refused to go on straight.
Each nail buckled
under the hammer's weight:
the small, silver shafts
wanted to turn in the opposite
direction, heartward.

I clawed them in and out
of their wooden nests,
wanting to build something
better, doing it for you:
a little kitchen, pine-panelled,
into which you would
walk nightly, singing
"I'm home!"

I measured the area
between the windows
for my counter, the long stretch
of wall. I decided
it was better not to be able
to see out.
Drawing on plywood
with pencil, I could already
picture myself
in an apron, feminine
and satisfactory.
But I couldn't seem to get
the level straight.

I asked you to come
and look and give advice.
Then I measured your distance
and went out and bought a stove
for it. It was either too big
or too small: it wouldn't give heat.
"That figures," I said to myself
the way carpenters do,
and traded it in
for the coldest refrigerator
I could find.

Watching me struggle,
planing rough edges, you said
"I feel ignored."
I whipped out my tape
measure, studying once again
your exact dimensions.
Perhaps curtains might
alter or improve things.
I bought plaster
and whitewash.
I pounded my two fists together
and nailed them shut.

Through the unfinished joists
of our unfinished kitchen
the rain and snow
were blowing in.
"No walls. No insulation."
you pointed out critically.
"Goodbye," you said,
packing your top hat and
dancing shoes and leaving.
Too busy to look up
I measured the floor,
your departure, by inches,
tapping, feeling,
exploring for supporting beams.