

TRAILER PARKED

By

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The thing was born in a place imagined.

To be sure, the place was real all right. Somewhere in the world the existence of the thing was conceived which then led to its creation. Funny word to use to describe the fabrication of a thing, I suppose, though in this case maybe apropos, given the circumstances of the tale of its coming into being and, as they say, the course of its useful life.

At inception the thing stood tall in the showroom, all shiny and new, not trying in the least little bit to attract attention to itself as a pup might, trying to stand out from the rest of the litter. It would just as soon stand there, unmoved and unmoving for all eternity. Not so were the feelings she had for it when my mom first laid eyes on the thing. She was to become its Geppetto, imbuing it with anthropomorphist characteristics that the thing felt nothing for.

It was not to be whisked away to a new home as far as it was concerned.

Indeed, it was a home unto itself.

How my mom longed to be cradled within the warm embrace of its cold, lifeless walls. She wanted to be spirited away to the wilderness beyond the reach of mere mortal humankind, all while nestled comfortably in the safe confines of an otherwise empty space.

Creature comforts there were in miniature, barely noticeable really. That would be beside the point for real adventurers longing to be free yet held captive in the vessel carrying them on their adventure into undiscovered places.

Alas, despite her best efforts to manifest the thing into her chariot, the thing remained un-bewitched, stationary as a pumpkin, still unmoved towards any form of forward motion.

My mom projected her own anxious feelings concerning the absence of any hint of alacrity towards any propulsion of the thing in any direction (especially forward), christening it with the moniker "Patience." Yet, but for one brief bout of restlessness that saw my mother and my father Norman drag the thing a few miles down the road for a brief commune with Mother Nature (all within the confines of walls that kept her at bay, of course), patience would have to be in abundant supply for those wishing for the thing to make any progress towards forward movement or, for that matter, any form of human habitation that would grace the inner sanctum of what had grown to become an unmovable object.

As if setting synthetic roots down firmly into the terra underneath, the thing refused to budge when enough gumption was instilled in Norman (no doubt with incessant urging) to hook the thing up to an enormous truck that was reduced to a hulking mass of useless potential, matching the thing that it was intended to drag out of its moorings, out of the back yard and down the highway. Norman was not about to launch into the unknown with a truck that refused

to start for unknown reasons, yanking an unwilling thing with unknown intentions other than standing pat, thank you very much.

Norman maybe thought the thing was jinxed, though he wasn't the type to think in those terms. He was perhaps later to change his mind on that score when he got enough of another wave of gumption to lay a ladder against the thing to work on scraping away the growth accumulating on the roof. Seems that, like stones also prone to avoiding any movement akin to rolling, the top of the thing was becoming just as overgrown with moss as the bottom was roots.

"Slippery when wet" is the cautionary lesson of this part of this tale.

Unmindful of Norman's best of intentions, the thing remained in slumber, unable to act even if willing to save Norman as he skidded along its side and fell to the muddy ground.

His leg snapped like a toothpick at the ankle. The pain chasing away any suspicions that a hex might be upon him, Norman dragged himself through the mud and towards the house where my mom was knitting. He was screaming for help, but she couldn't hear him until he was nearly to the back door.

Not long after that, the thing was wrenched from its invisible berth and dragged down the road just a short distance from its usual haunts. There it was positioned by the big truck of an old Florida roughneck in the back yard of my sister.

The roughneck man eyed her with a knowing look.

"Now, don't you go being afraid of it," he said.

I wonder what he meant by that.

I was soon enough to learn firsthand what he meant.

My sister reportedly disavowed any feelings of being intimidated by the thing but, then again, was content to let it remain sedentary right where the guy with the rough neck put it.

She graced the confines of its walls with a regular presence, using it as her office, but rarely daring to spend the night. She was not afraid of the thing exactly, but, on the other hand, why tempt fate? When the time came for my sister to move on to greener pastures, the time also came for the thing to either be put out to a pasture of its own, or find a new lease on life.

She offered it to me not so much as a family heirloom but as a red-haired stepchild that had been chained up in the basement all these years. Not wanting to upset my mother who I thought was in love with the thing, I agreed to take it in. It was rolled down a hundred miles of highway by the rough guy with the neck, apparently without any signs of resistance.

I did not know at the time that my mom, far from feeling love for the thing, lived in fear that as she got older her kids would force her to live in it.

Blissfully ignorant that my mother's initial infatuation with Patience had turned into a growing apprehension that she would become literally captivated by it, I took possession of the hulking mass (but not me by it). In hindsight, I should have suspected her true feelings when she would bring out her cherished memories contained in a large pile of photo albums and

memorabilia. I must confess that after a while my eyes did glaze over and my mind wandered a bit as she identified this one and that one in her photos but never, as I now recall, this thing.

It was not as if she did not keep pictures of other things she held dear.

Old houses, motorcycles, cars, airplanes, ramshackle shacks, and even a couple of old motor homes graced the pages of her voluminous cache of photo albums. After she passed, I rummaged through the collection she left behind to confirm what I now know to be the awful truth: She held dear not a single solitary image of her beloved Patience.

Upon laying eyes on the thing as it lumbered down the street in the direction of my place like some unwanted house guest, already creaking and groaning in protest at the inconvenience of it all, I instantly understood my sister's presumed trepidation, if not fully her desire to rid herself of that which had spent the past several years parked at her home, unwilling to budge nary an inch from its perch, staying entrenched there well past any initial welcome.

In motion, after all, it did cut an imposing figure.

Foolishly presuming that the thing would prefer to spend the remainder of its useful life being, well, useful, it was pressed into service to take the lead at that year's Pioneer Days Festival. It was then and there that I spent the first – and only – night inside the belly of this beast. Not that there was any hint that I myself was not welcome to spend some quality time there inside its four walls. Yet still, there was no feeling of being safe and secure inside of it, protected from whatever was lurking out in the warm night air in the field where the festival was to take place the next day. If anything, I was the one on guard duty, not the other way around.

I probably should have checked the owner's manual to see if attending festivals was among those tasks for which this vessel had been commissioned. In all events, I should have known better than to drag the thing out to be seen in public. In doing so I felt no shame for myself but failed to consider the true impact of appearances for a once bright and shiny object that had over the years become shabby enough to be one of derision instead of pride.

Of course, the proverbial phrase "pride goeth before a fall" is something my mom, quoting her father the Reverend Dewey M. Scott, was overheard to say on at least one occasion.

The second (and last) time the thing graced a festival with its presence it did not fare well. It was unable (or unwilling) to generate enough cool air from its AC units to alleviate a festival goer's alleged heat stroke she was suffering from out in the unyielding Florida sun.

In the end my friend and festival co-worker Kurt dragged the thing back to my place – after fixing the flat tire, that is.

Patience had one more tour of duty out in the field before it came to rest for a good long nap. A longtime friend had need of it as a base of operations for her son who had come down from New York to help her salvage what was left of her home on Manasota Key, which had burned down nearly to the ground in a freak accident fueled by an unknown agency.

I had visited with her the evening before the fire. An image of the place remains in my mind's eye in much the same way images of people you have just seen days or hours before they die linger in your brain. It is as if the image of a person you just saw in life but a moment ago

cannot be reconciled with the reality that that human being is now a corpse lying on a slab at the morgue. I would liken it to the first stage of grieving a loss: the one where you are in denial.

In the case of my friend and her moribund abode, images in my mind included that of her husband sitting at a table in their house, signing some papers. He too had passed from this mortal coil, having left planet Earth not that long before the fire broke out. His ashes had been residing there in that House of Usher when the flames reduced the house itself to ashes.

His were never recovered.

They now reside mixed in with the other ashes that eventually became part of the earth where his house once stood. In that spot, centuries before, the bodies of indigenous peoples who had once called Manasota Key home were also interned, making for an unmarked graveyard. Patience bore witness to workers sifting through a debris field that had once again become a burial ground, trying in vain to dig out the remains of an old man that were destined to remain in that place for all eternity.

Kurt brought the thing back to my place – and back into retirement – where it would be parked in a wooded area across from my house. There it stayed for a long time, long enough for the trees and vegetation to grow around it, obscuring any view of its discolored exterior. Not gone but almost forgotten, it seemed content to just sit there as it often did over the years.

Unmoved. Waiting for someone – or something – to happen along.

Despite its near invisibility, someone ventured into the wooded area where it was enjoying its seclusion and solitude to take in its grandeur. Had the thing been crying out to be rescued, or at least to make its near spectral presence known to passersby, like some phantom creature in a macabre tale emanating from the recesses of Edgar Allan Poe's overactive imagination? What force piqued the curiosity of the code enforcement officer to hack his way through the overgrowth to come upon the forlorn thing he saw there? Maybe he felt protestations on its behalf rising up within him and onto the pages of the citation he wrote up – with no small measure of smug gleefulness.

It became known as the case of the immovable object colliding with an invisible force.

The theory of the case – such that it was – is that the land upon which the thing was sitting was thereby being put to an illegal "use," namely, the parking of a vehicle. The County conceded that the offense was only that, and not that the sight of the thing (which could not be seen from the street) presented a visage unpleasing to the eye, amounting to a nuisance in violation of the peace and dignity of the rest of the neighborhood, replete as it was with dilapidated structures, unseemly attempts at landscaping and parked recreational vehicles in various stages of decline.

This is how, in the twisted logic of the code enforcement machinery of justice, the thing was to be dragged out of its hiding place and put front and center in my driveway where it was somehow far more visible yet less offensive to the aesthetics of the neighborhood, the people of which could better enjoy the full ambiance of our community now that a thing that had seen better days could join its cohorts which adorn the driveways and adjoining lots of a neighborhood that had itself seen better days.

I suppose that was an apt enough way for the county to maintain the sense of place that the modest homes in this neighborhood had grown used to.

Not exactly a righteous enough cause to bring the thing into the open like that under a provision of the county code – which does not exist – that is rumored to say that the code prohibits the use of land to place a thing on it. Thus the name of the case became all the more fitting. An invisible law forced an otherwise invisible and immovable object to be dragged across the street and parked for all the world to see.

Under the circumstances, I cannot say that the bedraggled thing now sitting in my driveway was a cause for a further decline in property values (including my own). That is not the reason that it was yet again dragged away, this time around the corner and to the back of the property where I live (and write wonderful stories of such things), next to Gottfried Creek.

There it was now situate among natural surroundings. This was a place where it was born to live out its days in peace. Which it did for the longest time.

Until the bees found it.

Workers were obliged to move the thing so they could get their equipment into the back to do some tree trimming. At the time I had noticed there were bees flying around my head but did not notice where they had focused their collective attention. This I found out when I saw one of the workers drive off with the thing in tow to bring it back around the front to my driveway.

En route I did notice the foreman doing some sort of dance, hopping around and whipping at his head and trousers with his hat.

Afterward, I don't know how I was able to coax the bee whisperer to come out to my place. He was nearly deaf which made it a challenge to talk to him on the phone.

When he finally did come out to my place, he told me a story about how another unintended beekeeper called to tell him that he was harboring "a large penis" at his place. He explained to me, with no hint of the absurd, that he could not hear very well.

That is why he mistook "I have a large bee's nest" for something far more risqué.

For all I know, it might have been me he had been speaking to.

The bee whisperer was already trudging headlong towards the thing that was now a beehive when he turned his head and asked over his shoulder if the Africanized bees he was about to greet were friendly. Surely he did not hear me when I shouted out some warnings.

But he got the message soon enough.

Before the queen and her swarm of worker bees, together with the massive honeycombs they had erected inside the walls of the thing were, with hypnotizing wisps of sweet-smelling smoke, coaxed out of their former abode, their tenancy proved to have lasted longer than any other living creature. Its innards gutted and walls torn apart, it seemed to be finally ready for the dustbin of its history.

Then Skip came along.

His appearance was as deceiving as that of his new host, which still had enough life to yet be useful. He restored the thing perhaps not quite to its former glory but enough to suit his purposes, which was to just have a peaceful spot, there in nature next to a creek where he could fish, keep an eye on that alligator that lives back there, and cavort with the raccoons, squirrels and other wildlife (not counting those rowdy kids living next door).

It seemed for all the world to be an idyllic end to a tortuous journey for both man, beast and, well, thing, enjoying life there along Gottfried Creek.

By all accounts Skip was very pleased with himself and his circumstances. Perhaps he was even a little bit proud. But, despite being long in the tooth, he had somehow yet to learn what pride precedes. He started to invite some of his acquaintances to share in the little slice of paradise he had made for himself. That was a natural thing for him to do, I suppose.

Surely my mom would turn over in her grave if she knew about the goings-on with Skip and his loud drinking buddies transforming the peace and tranquility along Gottfried Creek into an outdoor saloon. The last straw was when he sprung one of his compatriots from jail.

He became Skip's bunkmate inside the thing.

The guy had nowhere to go, according to Skip. Problem was one of the conditions for his release from jail was to stay away from alcohol. Neither Skip nor his new roommate were ready to abstain from imbibing – especially when it came to an ice cold beer with breakfast.

They were forced to move on.

I have no doubt that Skip regretted having to leave. Maybe he even had some inkling that he had himself sown the seeds of his own fall from grace, leading to his unceremonious departure from what was, for him, a garden of earthly delights. As always the thing of course remained unmoved both before Skip came and after he left.

I must confess here and now that I am not the least bit remorseful as to the disposition of Skip (if he is reading this now – I do apologize in advance) despite the fact that he was obviously a learned man of letters, having read all three books I had written.

You see, mine was a place along Gottfried Creek much the same as Thoreau's on Walden Pond. As writers we image ourselves in nature, living among other living things, thinking great thoughts and wanting to share our experience with the rest of humanity. Yet once we find our space in nature, we also find that we do not want other humans around.

They make too much noise. They disturb the natural order of things. Which is to say my peace of mind and that of my neighbors (whom I hardly know).

The thing remained undaunted by this latest fiasco involving its tenure as something useful. Sure, it had provided a fleeting moment of glory as a place for an otherwise homeless man to find a place to rest his head, but was soon disparaged of any notion that this was a worthwhile cause. It remained, as always, unmoved.

Indeed as the months and then years passed, a new crop of bees made an appearance to reestablish some sort of relationship with the thing. But at this point it had apparently asserted

itself. The new crop of bees could not make a go of it. They were sent packing by some force probably radiating outward from the belly of that beast.

This was perchance for the bees' own good.

Soon the hurricane would change everything.

All living things, and even those who were not, were battered into submission by the most ferocious of hurricanes to land in Englewood (so far).

Gone were many of the trees and other vestiges of nature that had provided all creatures, great and small, with a place to call home.

Miraculously my own humble abode withstood the onslaught intact. But not so my beloved trees and other living things that made this spot along Gottfried Creek worthy even of comparisons to Thoreau's Walden Pond. As if to drive the point home even more so, the thing also survived. Battered and war torn, trees assailing its walls, it remained standing. The living things had given the things that do not breathe yet one more chance to prove their worthiness.

Battered and bruised, yet clinging to a life that it does not have, this thing remains true to form. Resilient, obstinate, unwilling to yield in the face of disrespect, abuse, neglect and dishonor, it sallies forth despite all that has been thrown at it and against its walls – and its will to carry on. Slowly the recovery from Mother Earth's wrath continued.

In my corner of the world, Mother Nature has already given us new growth to replace that which had been vanquished by her own hand. My house remains unscathed. It does not mock the trees that gave their lives to protect it – and me – from almost certain doom. It is, after all, but a thing, not something alive that can have such feelings.

'Tis a kindred spirit of that other thing in the back along Gottfried Creek that clings not to life, but to meaning. What is the meaning it has known?

None really, at least not of its own accord.

But to others it provided the ability to hold fast to an ideal, a means towards an end, a place not of confinement (unless you thought of it that way), but of hope – of sanctuary. This thing is not living, but it lives on in ways that are more than symbolic.

Patience counsels against casting a thing to the winds that are ferocious enough to throw huge trees against its walls but not enough to crush it – or its spirit.

It is but a thing to be sure.

But a thing to be cherished.