

Old Bunny

More than a few years ago when we were a young family, we traveled to Europe for four months. It was the adventure of a lifetime and was in no way diminished by having as a constant traveling companion, Victoria, our four year old daughter. Certainly Tory must have been somewhat bewildered by the sudden surrender of a comfortable suburban home for a tent. For that is how we traveled, rain or shine, three travelers in a Volkswagen Bug filled to overflowing with our canvas and steel home and accessories.

Tory was, in fact, a good sport. She suffered through art museums and national monuments, finding amusement in simpler things like exploring campgrounds, making friends with children with whom she had not a word in common, or playing make believe games in her own special world.

We traveled constantly and packed and unpacked the bug each day. Every piece of luggage had its assigned place in the none too spacious interior of the car. The passengers were held immobile by large and small packages. Tory, who by virtue of her junior status in the family, was assigned to the rear seat. Among the camping gear and duffle bags she had a little private environment, large enough to progress one project or another, or to play with her small supply of personal toys.

Only one possession had any real meaning to Tory. This was Old Bunny. The name differentiated this beloved object from a newer, more presentable rabbit, who was hardly given the slightest attention. Old Bunny was well named. He was much the worse for wear, an undefined grey in color after countless heavy duty cycle washings. He had the texture of flannel pajamas, and all distinguishing markings had long since disappeared except for two piercing glass eyes, the color of honey or tiger opals. His shape could only be described as comfortable. His size was either small or just right, and, in fact, both were true.

Old Bunny had many duties, and he was most reliable in their execution. First he was always on call to act whatever part was needed in the current fantasy, helpless baby, Wicked Witch of The West, knight or king, a missing friend, a villainous foe. Second, he was a necessary meal-time companion who ate whatever items of food displeased Tory. Third, he was expected to join in all family songs, and if the truth be told, he had a fine tenor voice. And finally he was always in attendance at bed time or nap time to provide just the right amount of reassurance. As Tory was read her nightly story, Old Bunny would curl up on Tory's shoulder with his imaginary whiskers almost touching her face. Tory could always feel his shallow warm breath on her cheek as she dropped off to sleep.

One day on our trip we were in a particular hurry. We had to cross a certain frontier border crossing before 8pm when it closed for the night. Our touring in the morning had taken longer than expected, and as we arrived back at our campsite to pack the car, we were late and feeling very anxious. My wife and I proceeded to strike the tent and pack our belongings while Tory retreated to sandbox to play and stay out of the way. In a wink we were packed, made last minute potty calls, climbed aboard, and were soon on the

local motor way headed for the distant border. With some satisfaction, we noted that we just might make it.

"Mommy, I can't find Old Bunny", came the small voice from the back seat. The despair and disbelief in the voice was there, but we did not hear it.

"Oh, he must be packed in the trunk. We'll get him out when we get to our next campsite", was the adult reply.

"But what if he's not there?"

"Don't be silly, he'll be there".

But Tory knew better. She could see clearly Old Bunny sitting on his throne of sand surveying his kingdom with regal satisfaction. She could imagine some thoughtless little child, finding him and taking delight in burying him in the sand. Later, she saw Old Bunny being thrown around by an older boy, who tossed him high into the air. He descended in an arc and landed in a thicket. The rains fell. Old Bunny became mired in the mud. His woven skin split and tore. In a very short time, all that was left were the two opal eyes, staring without purpose at the sky.

Tory imagined this in an instant. She knew she would never see Old Bunny again. The loss, the despair, the panic overwhelmed her. She wept, as she had never wept before. The comforting assertions of the adults were not heard. After awhile she slept, but visions of Old Bunny persisted. In a cruel fantasy, over and over again she saw Old Bunny being pulled from the car trunk, and felt the relief and the joy of reunion. Only to awake enough to realize that it was not true and the despair descended again.

In the dark of the night she felt herself being lifted up and placed down on her cot. In the darkness she heard her parents talking.

"Did you find it" said her mother.

"No. she must have left it somewhere".

"That's too bad. We ought to get her another rabbit tomorrow".

"Sure, if we have time".

To this day, the pain of losing Old Bunny can still be found in the inner most parts of Tory's heart.