

The trunk was delivered to his door on a Tuesday just before five. It sat on the front porch with nonchalant authority, waiting for him to get home. It looked like an old steamer trunk, like one his father used to have, maybe three feet long, two feet high, two feet wide, about that. It wasn't worn but clearly wasn't new. No tags on it, nothing to indicate where it came from or if it was indeed intended for him. He was certainly not expecting it, he knew he didn't order it, would not have ordered it, had absolutely no memory of ordering it, had no need for a steamer trunk so why would he have ordered such a thing?

That's when he noticed there was a small lock on the latch to the lid. Whoever sent this thought the recipient had a key to this little lock, so it must have been mistakenly delivered. But with no labeling or invoice of any kind, how could he find out who sent this? He went into the house and called FedEx to see if a delivery had been made to his address. He called UPS, USPS. No record of any such delivery. He googled freight companies and began calling them. Still, nothing. It must have been delivered by an individual, dropped off here by mistake. Opening it might reveal an answer to who might be the rightful owner. He decided to bring it inside.

Lifting one end by the side handle, feeling that it was not very heavy, he opened his front door and pulled the trunk into his house. Then, with a paper clip, he tried to jimmy the lock, hoping he could wiggle it open. Nothing clicked, the lock remained locked. He got a small hacksaw from his garage, intending to cut it off. However, he couldn't get a good enough grip to hold the lock still to properly saw. He kept trying for several minutes until the saw slipped and cut a gash in his hand.

After tending to his wounded hand and wiping up the blood spots from the floor, he went next door to his neighbor and asked to borrow a bolt cutter, with which he quickly dispatched the little lock. Anxious to see inside, he lifted the latch and grabbed hold of the lid. It didn't budge. He looked at the back hinges to see why they wouldn't move but they showed no signs of unusual wear or rust or anything that would keep them from hinging the way hinges should. He got a flat head screwdriver and tried to wedge it in the slit to see if he could pry it open. But again, the lid wouldn't move, as if it was glued shut. He put the screwdriver down, not wanting to damage the front of the trunk.

The trunk sat solid on the living room floor. He sat down in front of it. Even though it seemed old, as if from a different century, the piece was in very good condition and though it looked like it should have a musty smell like these old trunks often did when you found them in attics covered in dust, this one carried no odor at all.

Because he had no need for this trunk and since his house was rather small, he thought maybe he would take it out to the side of the street where someone else would come along, be attracted to it, and take it away, so he opened the front door and went to lift the trunk by its side handle. It seemed heavier than it was when he brought it in. As he moved closer to the door, the trunk became heavier still until he could no longer hold it up. It whumped to the floor. So he began dragging it. The closer it got to the threshold, the heavier it became and the harder to move. He got behind it and tried pushing but his feet just slipped back and forth. Thinking it might be stuck on some floorboard unevenness, he tried yanking it back with the hope of being able to create more of a running start to overcome the blocking obstacle. It was at this point he realized that he could move the trunk away from the door but not towards it. As if it was deploying invisible iron claws whenever being presented with the prospect of being moved outside.

Again he sat down on the floor in front of the trunk. The trunk stared blankly back at him, with what seemed a smug sense of accomplishment. He extended his leg and pushed the trunk with his foot. The trunk felt lighter again and moved quite easily. He got up on his knees and tried lifting a corner. Again, the trunk lifted, not heavy at all. He got to his feet and bent to pick up the trunk holding both side handles and now it felt quite light, as if it liked being held this way. He looked around his living room for a place to put it, maybe he could use it as a side table or a plant stand. He moved towards the front window then felt a tug of renewed heaviness as he got closer to the front door. He put the trunk down, rearranged some chairs so that he could more easily place the trunk under the window without having to skirt too close to the door. The trunk seemed pleased.

When he spoke to his children that evening by phone, his first thought was to tell them all about this strange trunk, but for some reason stopped himself from mentioning it. The trunk sat resolute by the front window and would seemingly not appreciate the prying inquiries his children would have. They were grown, and had moved their lives a thousand miles away, now with families of their own.

They were rarely all together but spoke by phone once a week. He talked to them only of inconsequential things, the weather, his neighbors, never about his secret thoughts, never about his health. His children had always respected and feared his stoic determination to live his life on his own terms, but they did worry about him now living alone after his wife's accident and unexpected death. (She had fallen from a ladder in Paris while visiting her sister.) But he was determined to live independently, to continue to live his ordered life, to carry on.

The trunk sat in its spot by the living room window for weeks. From time to time, he would move the objects he had placed upon it-- two potted plants, two ceramic birds, the urn with his wife's ashes-- to see if he could open the lid, always with no success. Eventually he quit trying.

After two months, he decided to find a different place in his house for the trunk. At first, the trunk felt heavy to lift, reluctant to leave its window view, but soon its weight lightened and he carried it easily into his den, setting it on end by the window there. Over the next few months, he would find different locations around his house for the trunk and discovered its preferences. It tolerated the dining room and kitchen for instance-- sometimes he wanted it to keep him company while he cooked-- but it refused to let him carry it into the back bedroom or his closet. It loved the living room window, but it seemed to love his bedroom, next to his bed, even more.

One night in September, the trunk silent beside his bed, he had a very vivid dream. The trunk was sitting in his driveway, the lid had come off and was propped up inside like a car seat. He went out to the trunk and stepped inside. A steering wheel appeared as well as tires on the bottom and he drove off to the city. The freeway was busy and had many turns and twists and soon he was driving in a curving tunnel that should have come to a new road but it just kept going, the walls closing in, and he was on his hands and knees trying to find a way out of this concrete cave and remembered he had parked his car just around the corner, if he could just find an exit sign to this tunnel and then he was on the street in the city, colossal buildings all around, honking cars, vendors roasting chestnuts and burned pretzels. And he found the spot around the corner, but the car, his trunk, wasn't there, so he racked his brain, retracing his steps, went around another corner, then another, felt completely lost. Then he woke up, a

hollow feeling in his heart. The trunk still silent by his bed in the early morning light.

The very next night, the trunk beside his bed, he had another very vivid dream. He had just come in from working in the yard and found the trunk standing on end, its lid open, waiting for him. Inside was a shelf and a clothes rod below, on the shelf was a styrofoam mannequin head, a sculpted portrait of himself. Beside this was a tall purple and gold drum major's hat adorned with many plumes and feathers. On the hanger below was a military uniform with a shiny brass belt and yellow sash that draped from shoulder to waist. He took these clothes out and, closing the trunk, proceeded to dress the trunk with the coat, belt, and sash and affixed the head to the top with duct tape. After putting the tall grandiose hat snugly on the mannequin's head, he carried his creation out to the curb where a shopping cart had been conveniently left. Wedging his avatar into the cart he began pushing it before him down the street towards town. Cars honked in appreciation as they passed him. He came to an intersection where he had to wait longer to cross because a covered wagon pulled by four mules and coated with slogans for Jesus was moving slowly, holding up traffic. At last, the intersection cleared and he crossed towards town where a few minutes later he arrived at the courthouse on the square. He carried his statue to the top of the stairs, set it down and sat beside it. Crowds began to gather with celebratory yells, garlands and flowers, heartfelt signs of praise and love, and a great cheer rose up accompanied by the ringing clangs of the courthouse bells. Then he woke up, with a fading sense of accomplishment and pride.

On the third night, he had yet another very vivid dream. He was coming to a large gracious home, a mansion of sorts, and the front door was the trunk, sitting on end, grown to towering proportion, its lid opened wide, beckoning him to enter. Inside, the walls were decked with ornamentation, the ceiling sparkled with chandeliers, a grand staircase went up to a ballroom, filled with people in cocktail attire, old friends, colleagues from work, he was handed a glass of wine and began to move about the room, nodding greetings and shaking hands when he saw her, his wife to be, he hair a silken black, her eyes a beguiling green, laughing with friends, she spotted him and her eyes smiled with a knowing warmth, and then they were naked amidst the crowd, with no shame only lust, and his penis began to grow, into a rod, into a snake, into a pink hose with a purple crested head, seeking her out amidst the crowd as she sought him, and she took hold of his

hose, spread her legs, opened her inner lips and put him in and then they were lying together on the banquet table, laughing with satisfaction, amazed at their defiance, feeding each other grapes and potato chips, then they ran from the house, down the grassy slope to the water's edge where the open trunk sat, a seat inside and two oars, and side by side they rowed out to sea, to an island with wind-swept trees where the house they had already built awaited them, the house on a hill above the bay, with tall evergreens behind them and gentle clouds above them, they lived their lives, helping the birds and critters raise their young, wolflings and crows.

His body was found by the next door neighbor, who had grown impatient for the return of his bolt cutter after so many months. The police notified the children who then, in shocked sadness, came to arrange the funeral and attend to the estate. Sorting through a life left behind.

Entering their father's house, they were struck by the silence, how complete and enveloping it was. The silence that fills the dwelling of the recently dead is unlike any other. All the objects left behind standing somber in attentive witness to this thick presence of eternity. The children moved through the house in slow motion as if swimming deep in the ocean, far beneath waves, far away from the world. They began looking through mail left on the dining room table, books left beside their father's favorite chair. They went into the bedroom, the shock of seeing the still unmade bed where he had been found. His watch on the nightstand under the lamp next to a small book of poetry. Beside the bed, an old steamer trunk they couldn't recall seeing before. Hoping that it perhaps contained letters or documents or mementos, secrets from his life from which the children could acquire new understanding of the man who was their father, they raised the lid. The trunk was empty.

Over the next several days, they went through all his belongings, separating things they each wanted to keep from the things they would try to sell at the estate sale. What remained would go to Goodwill or the landfill. There would still be many issues to settle, selling the house, his car, dealing with probate, his will. But at least the burden of all these things would be lifted, free to hover in weightless memory.

Many people flocked to the sale as they tended to do in this neighborhood, and they sold more than they expected. Even the old trunk. To a funny old man who drove an old red pickup truck. Balding, pot-bellied, wearing a red and yellow striped shirt and a sweet smile and saying almost nothing, he paid for the trunk with five one dollar bills. The children watched as he picked up the trunk with both hands and carried it to his truck. An odd duck, they thought to themselves.

Carrying on with the sale, they missed seeing that just before hoisting the trunk into the back of his pickup he took a small lock from his pocket and snapped it quickly onto the trunk's front latch. Back in the cab, he took an old map from the glove compartment and with a weary sigh, opened it on the seat beside him and traced his finger on the roads until it landed on the spot he had marked with a pen the night before. Then he turned the key, put the truck in gear, and drove away.