

The Painted Lady of Marrow Bone Road

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The Painted Lady of Marrow Bone Road

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THE PAINTED LADY OF MARROW BONE ROAD

As I approached the end of Brown Road, I started braking earlier than usual since I was unfamiliar with the roads. I was also escorting, in the Dodge Durango, my pregnant wife, Patti, and the rest of

the team, two sons and two daughters. Patti was four months pregnant at the time and doing fine but I didn't want to stop too fast and risk undue pressure from the seat belt. As I slowed to a full stop, I looked both ways with absolutely no idea which way to turn.

"Marrow Bone Road?" Patti questioned, wrinkling her nose and mouth as she noticed the street sign. "That's not a very pretty name for our new address...even if there is a house for sale around here," she added in a tone that made me wonder why I turned on Brown Road. Of course, I could have been driving on Brown Road toward Outhouse Road and wouldn't have known it.

We were driving around the Salisbury area on that sunlit Saturday morning in March, looking for our next home. With four youngsters and another on the way, we were quickly outgrowing our modest three-bedroom home south of town. I looked forward to a four- or five-bedroom home with a dozen bathrooms, one for each of us and a half-dozen spares in case we had guests.

"Hmm...that way looks heavily developed," Patti said, pointing to the left. "But this way, there's a lot of open space and farms," she said as she looked to her right.

"Right it is," I said, urging the Durango beyond the stop sign in a right turn on Marrow Bone Road. I drove past two farms with chicken houses, pole sheds, and expansive fields of freshly-seeded earth.

Less than a mile toward the east, Patti exclaimed, "Hey, hey, what's that?" pointing toward the right just ahead of us. I saw a huge, old house surrounded by weeds and sprawling, unkempt forsythia. Near the road, yet partially camouflaged by high weeds, was a 'For Sale' sign. To say that the house was in need of repair was a gross understatement.

I slowed down, flipped the right turn signal on and pulled into what I hoped was a driveway, overgrown with weeds and grass that had not been mowed in years. Not intending to get out of the Durango, I left the engine running. I didn't want to encourage Patti's interest in the house. I rested my arms on top of the steering wheel and stared out the windshield.

It was an interesting house of Victorian style with a wrap-around porch, mansard roofs and intricate corbels mounted at the top of the porch posts. It was topped with shallow hip-roofs and rain gutters were barely attached to the hip roof. As visually interesting as the house was, I couldn't help but notice its sad expression. The clapboard siding, covered in a heavy gray patina, was probably its original protection against the elements. As I followed the lines toward the roof, I saw a hint of original color, yellow ochre, under the mansard overhang to the far right.

Many of the window sashes held broken panes and, in some cases, no glass at all. Able to see only the front of the house, I counted six windows, three of which were accompanied by only one shutter and two of those were barely hanging on to the clapboard. The porch, although substantial, sagged at each end, giving the house the appearance of frowning at everyone who passed without giving it a second glance. Of all the features of the house, the most unusual was an addition on the east side that rose above the main structure and included third and fourth floor windows.

Aside from the odd addition, I was reminded of the house where I grew up on Cemetery Street in Sharptown, some twenty miles away. It was as old as this house, probably no less drafty and as outdated in electric, plumbing and heating systems. I had not thought about that house for many years -- for good reason.

As I scanned the house again to look for more details, I said, "Patti, this house isn't -- "

"Shhh...shhh," Patti whispered. She was holding her cell phone to her ear. While I was concentrating on the drawbacks of the house, she had dialed the number on the 'For Sale' sign.

"Oh, hello, I'm calling about a house that's for sale on Narrow...no...Marrow Bone Road," Patti said with a questioning tone. After a few seconds, she continued, "Well, we're sitting outside the house now. We just came across it driving around and -- " After a few more seconds, she said, "Sure, we can wait fifteen minutes. I'm sure our kids could use a stretch anyway. Okay, we'll see you soon. Thank you." She closed her cell phone and, with a wicked smile under wide eyes, turned and looked at me.

I pretended to crumple into the steering wheel as I reached to turn the engine off and remove the key. *

Dr. Jack Tilghman and his wife, Patti, need a larger home for their growing family. They find a sad Victorian house that Patti, an architect, falls in love with. But, Jack resists because the house reminds him of his childhood home and memories that he fought and buried long ago. He is forced to confront those memories and learn the truth about his childhood from an unexpected source.

This short story is the retelling of *Marrow Bone Road* from the *other* perspective.

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