



Origin Story

A Cow Texas Short Story

BY MAJORIE GRUPP

It was dark. And very wet. Not unlike the birth canal from which he emerged 28 years ago. But there was something about the cave that stood in front of him that made him uneasy. Much like the birth canal, thinking back on it.

There was a crack of lightning, followed by a very loud boom of thunder. Several fat drops fell, their impacts detonating like cluster bombs in the leaf litter. He had forgotten his umbrella tonight. He had no choice. This was his chosen profession, after all. If there was

anyone to blame, it was himself. Charles the Dentist took a deep breath in, and entered the cave.

He had been called out to a lot of weird places, to be sure. But never a cave. A dark, moist crevice in the middle of the night. He was not sure if it was appealing, or unappealing. One thing was for sure: he was peeling his pants.

Charles the Dentist smiled. He wasn't sure why, but figured it had something to do with the author's self acclaimed excellence in puns.

With flaming torch in hand he ventured. Only 40 meters into the cave he met a small blind man reading a newspaper in the dark.

The man, known as Old Man Sam, without raising his eyes from the newspaper, ushered Charles the Dentist onward. And so on he ushered. Unsure of the scene of Old Man Sam, he selectively agreed.

And sure enough, a secondary problem arose. Two paths. One to the left, and one to the right. Old Man Sam said nothing about such a decision. Charles the Dentist was at a crossroads. It would no doubt shape Charles the Dentist's futile future. One to certain death. One to certain death, in a more roundabout way. He must choose wisely. His life depended on it.¹

Then he realised this was not a crossroads, but a fork in the road - and certainly not a roundabout. What would Charles do? He was stuck, in the road.²

It is often said in life, that in the void of decision making, decisions are in effect being made. That is, by not making a choice, you are actively choosing to not choose. Hereby, a choice.

¹ His life didn't depend on it. Are you even reading the story?

² Firstly, he's not dead yet. Ergo, however little remains, he still has a life. Death is certain for us all, so any choice of roads, in a roundabout way, could be said to lead to death. Furthermore, we now see a 'third way', which is simply to remain where he is. Of course, in addition, he could go back. Do pay attention!

Charles sensed the two roads ahead didn't bode well for him. Perhaps it was the stench of a thousand dead spanish mackerel to the left, and green, bubbling, fluorescent ooze to the right. But you couldn't be sure what was going through Charles the Dentist's head on a good day, let alone a bad one. And so he sat there, not thinking he could simply go home to his loving wife, indecisive. And by doing so, made the worst decision he could have possible made.

The phone rang. The one in his pocket. It startled Charles the Dentist. He looked at the screen, and read: "Incoming call from Old Man Sam."

"That's weird", he thought to himself. "I didn't put his name in my phone!" He paused, and suddenly realised. "And this isn't my phone!" He threw the Play School corded phone to the corner of the room.

Something smelt fishy about the whole situation. The spanish mackerel, to be precise. He knew he had to investigate it further. And so by choosing not to choose, he had actually chosen the smelly, fish trodden path to the left. Survivor bias? Maybe.

It was at this sudden moment when Old Man Sam came frantically running from behind Charles the Dentist, bumping into the walls as he went. Being blind did not help in an escape attempt.

He was screaming something about the "fishermen returning." Old Man Sam didn't seem too excited about the whole proposition, as he ran past Charles the Dentist and onward down the dark tunnel. Charles the Dentist decided it was in his best interest that he followed Old Man Sam in earnest.

And so he did. The tunnel seemed to last forever. But it didn't. It lasted about 10 meters. And then the tunnel opened up into a humongous cavern. It was so large, you couldn't even see the roof. Which could be argued that the roof didn't exist. But it did. How do I know this? I'm writing the story, god damnit. It was a cavern, alright? ³

In front of the two of them was a very unsensible pathway, leading to an Orb atop a mantelpiece in the middle of the cavern.

³ Unreliable narrator? I guess we'll never know for sure.

Either side of the pathway, cliffs down to certain death. There were demons down there, to be sure. Balrogs and the like.

Torchlights flickered behind them. The fisherman had returned. And they were close. They sounded angry. And drunk. Maybe just drunk. Definitely drunk.

Charles the Dentist looked at Old Man Sam, with his normal, functioning eyes. Old Man Sam looked at Charles the Dentist, with his blind eyes. Come to think of it, they were glass eyes. The pupils were coloured in texta, with small smiley faces drawn in the middle. There was a permanent twinkle etched into the left. It caught Charles by surprise. But what didn't catch him by surprise, was what he had to do next.

He pushed Old Man Sam off the edge of the pathway, and made a run for the Orb.

Old Man Sam wouldn't be alone, falling to eternity. For only milliseconds later, thousands of fisherman came running into the cavern, pushing each other out of the way. They too, it seemed, also wanted to get their hands on the Orb.

Hundreds of fishermen fell off the pathway, and like a crash of rhinos, they progressively made headway on the pathway as a single entity. Where fishermen fell away, singing drunken songs as they did so, more behind took their place in their pursuit of the Orb.

In front of them, Charles the Dentist clambered on, tripping and almost falling off himself, as he constantly looked behind him on the ever closing swarm of fisherman. He could smell the whiskey on their breath.

But that's the good thing about being the main character, he suddenly realised. Things seem to work out in your favour.

Charles the Dentist slowed down to a walk, as he climbed the final few steps to the pedestal to where the Orb lay. The fishermen, as if acknowledging defeat, stopped dead in their tracks. After a moment of

reflection and realising that each of them had spent their whole life fishing, but were still yet to catch a single fish, decided to give up, turnaround, and pursue a more reliable career. Maybe something like accounting, they thought. Or craypots.

Charles, ever so carefully, approached the Orb. It emitted a metallic humming sound. An aura of danger, perhaps. Regardless, he knew what he had to do. More precisely, the author told him.

Charles picked up the Orb in his hands. Nothing happened immediately. And so he sat down, staring at the Orb as if hoping something would. And something did. But not as quickly as he thought.

It was weeks until he started to feel something. It was a few months until he saw it started to grow. When he placed his hands on it, he swore he could feel something move inside. It was a thing of beauty. A divine miracle, no doubt.

3 seasons passed, and Charles the Dentist opened his eyes after taking a quick nap. In his hands lay a baby girl.

He blinked. The baby was now a toddler.

He blinked again. She was now a little girl.

They grow up so fast.

He wasn't in a cavern anymore. Now, a kid's bedroom. A night light shone dimly in the corner. The girl was asleep in the bed in front of him. She looked so innocent. So unaffected by the world around her. So peaceful.

Charles smiled. He got up from his chair, glanced one last time at the girl in the bed, and walked down the corridor.

Yup. The birds and bees story had gone heaps better than he thought it would.

Majorie Grupp is a fictional author who writes fictional stories.

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