The Initial Drive

By: Alec Vaughn Hensley

Her arms wrapped around my small torso and her fat leg snuck under my miniature leg. After a time, her mother-in-law crept in and sat down next to her while relaying a groan. I glanced over at Mickey who was not caring what was happening to us but preoccupied with a 6-pack of Mountain Dew and a fishing story with Carl. Feeling the wave of anxiety dissipate away I gently tapped the accelerator and we crossed the road and then the ditch. I kissed civilization goodbye.

As soon as we pierced the threshold of eyesight I broke free of her wrapped arms she had around me. In my jubilant act of rebellion my tiny legs picked me up so I was standing under the steering wheel. The distinctions of trees slowly faded away and the noiseless forest slowly perished to the steady crescendo of an engine.

I could see somewhat. Just enough to see and avoid the big stuff ahead; trees, bushes, junked cars. Not missing any ruts or creeks along the way the ride began to feel just as energetic and amusing as a roller coaster. The steady crescendo of the engine lost the grand solo and became a duet with the sharp elderly Pentecostal screams as this orchestra swiftly traveled throughout the forest.

It never occurred to me to slow down at this point. No one really bothered to show me how but that isn’t the point. The point is when you are sitting on top of your own little world you never wanted to come down. But what comes up must, indeed, come down.

Eventually, we came to an overhang in the terrain that I spotted a long distance away. I desired to see what would happen if we went off of that. Nothing would happen. I am on top of the world. I-am-invincible. The rubber of the tires left the ground and flew in a majestic arc.  I could now distinguish the differences between the trees, the harmonious duet fell to a maddening pause, and I fell back into her lap.

I closed my eyes. The song ended in a fortissimo note.

I lazily unsealed my eyes. It was over. The ebony smoke leaked out in a snaked pattern from the engine. Leaves and sticks were scattered randomly throughout the ground and their hair and blouses. I wondered if they were still alive, Mom would kill me if I’d killed them. I laid there awkwardly for the next few minutes wondering if they were breathing or not.

To my lucky, yet awful fortune, they both were alive.

In one quick hand motion she picked me up by my earlobe and said, “What the Hell, Alec? Don’t you know what you’ve done? You’ve wrecked Mickey’s golf cart and wrecked it a mile outta woods, you Sunovabitch! Now we gotta walk outta the woods to come right back here and tow this wreck right back out!”

This was when her mother-in-law put a hand on her shoulder and she immediately let go of my ear lobe. She then grabbed me by arm and marched me to the nearest bush. There she made a switch and dropped my pants in a fraction of a second. She proceeded to switch me for the remainder of that hour.

She never said anything when she did it nor did she say anything for the rest of that night to anyone. All I knew at the time is that it hurt like bejesus. The walk home was excruciatingly painful. I almost asked for someone to carry me they soon as left me than carry me anywhere. I could see the wake of devastation my driving caused. All forms of flora were completely eradicated in the path of the cart. Large ruts were left where we went and different parts of the cart itself laid scattered from our walk back home.

Soon enough the long chafing walk ended with the house in sight. Slowly everyone turned to see a 4 year old limping with a dark red spot in between his legs and two elderly Pentecostal women with mud on their skirts, sticks in their hair, and scratch marks on their faces walking slowly out of the woods. We aroused a laugh out of some but most just gaped. My grandmother began to tell the story of how the young Sunovabitch and has dastardly misadventures while her mother-in-law went inside and went to bed.

Grandma was irate about how some Sunovabitch destroyed the family reunion today and how she made nearly every capable male drive their Fords into the forests in the direction of the ebony snake trail, but I didn’t care. I hid in the bathroom to wash my wounds and cry.

Carl found me in there and explained to me how his wife wasn’t an angry witch or how she would eventually get over the day’s events. After he was done he carried me to his truck and drove me home from Bearwaller all the way to Richmond.

He didn’t say anything else in that truck ride. He just drove and let me ride front seat. The next I saw my parents was after the family reunion. Another scolding came and went, another round of spankings came and went, and another round of being grounded came and went.

In the end, there is a reason why my family no longer has any family reunions.