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By Walter H. Crandall

Wilson cast a furtive look across the street, then glanced again at his watch. It was 12:35PM and Number 16 was already twelve minutes late. To clam himself, we wedged his hand into his pocket, fondling the crisp twenty dollar bill that his son Georgie had sent him for his seventy-fifth birthday. His passport to Birdie Lou’s Cafe—the best ribs in town. Only eight minutes away.

Then, suddenly, he heard the unmistakable sound of grinding gears roaring up the hill. He let out a deep sigh of anticipation, as his mind took an unexpected U-Turn into the past.

In picturesque detail he saw the rough-hewn table at his childhood church--Willow Creek Baptist--laden with a dizzying array of succulent dishes: golden brown fried chicken, honey baked hams, thick slabs of roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, butternut squash, turnips, string beans, and every imaginable variety of fresh baked pies. “Ah,” he thought, as his mind drifted lazily along, like a sleepy creek.

A kid clattered by on his skateboard.

Then, for no apparent reason, his mind jumped-frogged into the future. Thanksgiving day. He saw his grown children with their families gathered around the Thanksgiving table, laughing and carrying on. But something was terribly wrong. He wasn’t there at the head of the table, deftly carving the thirty-five pound turkey into ample portions for the Perry-Milton clan. In fact, he wasn’t there at all!

“Hey mister, you gettin’ on or what?” bellowed the bus driver.

Wilson peered into the shiny, bright interior of the bus, wondering who was the stranger driving his bus. Before he could point this out, the bus driver spoke again, this time much louder, “Mister are you gettin’ on or what?”

“Oh,” mumbled Wilson, as he jumbered up the steps. There he proudly presented his retired bus driver’s pass.

The bus driver brusquely waved him back. Just as he was about to close the door, a muscular young man with his menacing expression of a Doberman Pincher lunged up the steps and grabbed Wilson by the arm. Behind him were two women. One was a teenager with stringy black hair, not a day older than 17. The other was much older, old enough to be the kid’s grandmother. They both screamed: “Stop him! Stop him!”

The bus driver instinctively held up his hands. “What’s going on?” he asked excitedly, his neck cords twanged with anxiety.

“He don’t belong here!” growled the young man. The teenager accusingly pointed her bony finger at Wilson. “He ’scaped again.”

“From the nursing home,” chimed in the older woman.

Wilson took refuge in a blank expression. The bus driver looked out his side window at the low slung brick building across the street and winced. Then he swivelled his head toward the intruders and barked, “Get that clown off my bus!”

The door hissed shut. It charged down up the hill, leaving Wilson and his caretakers behind, standing by the curb in the pale November sunshine.

The male attendant grabbed hold of Wilson’s left arm, and the older woman his other arm. Almost with childhood willingness Wilson allowed himself to be escorted into the street. The teenager, who had strategically positioned herself behind him, barked furiously at him, as if she were a wire hair terrier nipping at his heels. Suddenly, without warning, Wilson dropped into a dead weight. Panic seized his captors, Wilson was built like a refrigerator and keeping him propped up, let alone entangling his arms which were tied into a Gorgon knot, required enormous strength and cunning.

A thin-necked woman in a royal blue Mercedes stuck her head out the window and started screeching like a stricken parrot.

“Aw, come on, Wilson,” pleaded the older woman “you’re holdin’ up traffic.”


“Do I need to get tough?” threatened the male attendant.

Wilson didn’t budge.

“That’s it!” he shouted, viciously yanking on Wilson’s tightly-clasped hands.

In the ensuing tug of was a Milky Way wrapper fluttered to the ground. Wilson unlocked his hands, sending his caretakers sprawling to the pavement. Wilson unhitched his trousers, then squatted.

“Aw, Gawd no!” the younger woman kept repeating distressingly, “Aw, Gawd no!”

“Oh, Lord, he didn’t!” shrieked the older woman. “This shit sure ain’t worth $4.75 an hour,” cursed the male attendant.

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Later that afternoon the Director of Nursing notified the family of the incident, as well as the numerous other infractions that Wilson had committed during the last two months.

Son Georgie and daughter Bea, along with their children and spouses, made a pilgrimage to the nursing home that night with a dinner offering of barbecued chicken and a freshly baked apple pie. Forming a circle around him, they watched in silence as Wilson accepted their offering. Between bites, Wilson looked up and nodded with approval.

The next day the janitor chuckled to himself as he mopped the hallway outside Wilson’s room. “I really got to hand it to the ole boy,” he thought. He knocked on Wilson’s door and went inside.

“Up for company, Wilson?” Wilson was sitting on the edge of his bed, tapping his left foot laconically on the shiny floor.

“I understand you had company last night,” the janitor said.

Wilson nodded.

“A long time,” said the janitor.

“Too long,” whispered Wilson. Then he held out his hand and asked, “Where’s my Milky Way?” The janitor dug the candy bar out of his pocket.

“No trouble,” he said, giving it to him. “You dig?”

“No trouble,” said Wilson, peeling off the wrapper.