

The Treasured Toy

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21

One beautiful Sunday in fall, as I was driving home from church, a tiny voice in my head kept nudging "Why don't you drop by Butterfield's? Just check, maybe they're having a preview." Butterfield's is our local auction house, a magical repository filled with furniture, books, and always a few surprises. For some reason, although I hadn't been there in a while, I drove to the auction house. A preview was in progress for an upcoming sale of toys and trains. It was the most complete collection of antique toys I'd ever seen, from ferris wheels to fire engines, military regiments to rocking horses. Soldiers rode on camels, on elephants, and on horseback. There were phalanx of foot soldiers, Greek cavalries, anti-aircraft squadrons, and marching bands. An astounding collection of trains, tracks and tunnels of every make and model filled the gallery.

Collectors swarmed like ants to honey, jockeying for prime viewing positions. Many items were in mint condition. I marveled at soldiers still snug in their boxes, cotton string anchoring their arms and legs, paint shiny as they day they were made. Train engines gleamed, never having been thrown from the tracks.

As I scanned the room, my gaze kept returning to a 1908 Pioneer chain-drive pedal car, the paint long since worn from the seat by some pint size drag demon. It had the most wonderfully worn patina and character. You could almost hear squeals and laughter rising from its dull finish. I glanced beyond it to a yellow tin ferris wheel. In one bucket sat a small china doll, so comfortable in her perch, you couldn't imagine her living elsewhere. She was joined by several teddy bears who looked rather gray, worn...and very loved.

When I checked the estimated auction prices, reality hit me like a cold wind. Items considered the "most" valuable had never been out of the box. Toys dented, scraped, or bearing a well chewed ear, were of course. I too, loved admiring the toys which were decades old, but looked like new, sitting in their original boxes with colorful graphics. Yet, it was the teensy striped scarves someone had added to the 3" soldiers of the 12th regiment, the tea set personalized with names painted on each teacup, the china doll in the ferris wheel that whispered these toys had been loved.

Suddenly, I felt sorry for sleek trains that had never swooshed through a papier maché mountain tunnel or screeched around a hairpin turn. They may have been carefully stored by someone, but they were never really *owned*. Once that teddy absorbs a spot of calamine lotion from a child with the measles or sports a chewed ear from a sprite cutting his teeth, he *belongs* to someone.

Epilogue

My cousin Sarah said "Your story reminds me of The Velveteen Rabbit." One day the little stuffed rabbit complained to his friend the Horse that he didn't want to be a toy; he wanted to be *real*. "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." ..."It doesn't happen all at once," said the horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out

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and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”

Sounds like Wabi-Sabi love to me. 😊