

Changing Paths

A Compilation of Short Stories

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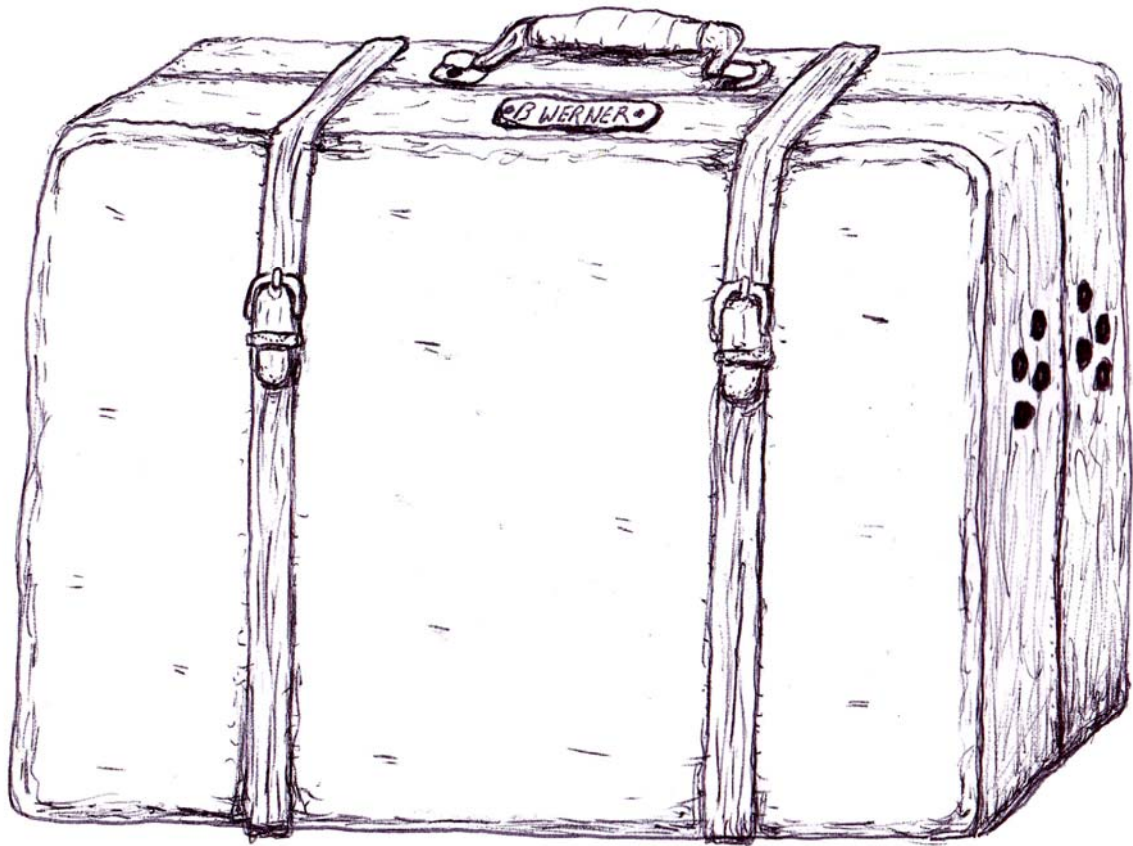
Changing Paths:

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by Horizon, Gitano

Beaner the Cowboy



Once upon a time — actually it was 1842 — there was a famous ocean liner that sank in the North Atlantic off the coast of New Brusselsprouts. The wreck has long since faded with time, and I no longer remember the name of the ship. Even if I did, you wouldn't recognize it, because, like I said, it has long since faded with time. All of it, that is, except for the story of one child: a baby boy who was the only unknown survivor.

Rudolf was the infant son of a Prussian Barron, the Barron Von Werner, who perished along with his wife in the shipwreck. The baby's miraculous survival was due to the fact that he had been smuggled on board in a floatable brief case with small air holes in one side to avoid having to pay the

extra \$3.50 for the child's fare. The brief case was one of the old sturdy leather and I-don't-know-what type of things you always see in old Westerns being tossed out of fast moving trains and had the Barron's name "B Werner" embossed on a nice little brass plaque near the handle. Living off of reverse osmotically purified sea water sucked from the leather straps, the baby managed to float for seventeen days and eventually wound up on the shores of southern Texas, infantile, pale and pruney, but otherwise OK. He was befriended by a Mexican prostitute named Juana La Cubana who had turned to her chosen profession out of frustration with what she perceived to be her parentally chosen partner's inability to impregnate her. Juana loved the boy and raised him as well as could be expected, given that she was a prostitute working on the border in the Old West. She never could pronounce what she thought was the boy's name, "Bwerner." It always came out "Buaner," which of course was bastardized to "Beaner" by everyone in town.

It wasn't easy growing up as a blond-haired, blue-eyed son of a Mexican prostitute in those days, so Beaner had to learn how to fight to survive and subsequently became a very good shot with the six-shooter that Juana had lovingly "bought" for him on his tenth birthday by sucking the brass off a doorknob. Eventually Beaner decided he needed to get out and make it on his own, so he headed West. He had managed to save up a few bucks — well, actually only three — shining the boots of his mom's customers while she worked. This was a rather risky business, however, as many of them chose not to remove their footwear during their amorous transactions. To make his meager fortune last as long as possible, he decided to go on foot. This idea lasted until the next town, which was about fifteen miles away.

The long, hot, misery-stricken miles had convinced him that what he really needed was a companion that could lighten the burden and isolation of such demanding travel. Someone who could help him down that long road of life. Someone he could depend on. What he needed was... a dog. There were plenty of dogs around as Beaner stumbled into town, crawling on dehydrated and sun-cracked hands and knees, calling out in a parched voice, "Water... water..." He soon discovered, however, that one dog alone was destined to be his. Everyone in town stood watching Beaner crawl painfully towards the town well. "What did he say?" they asked each other in whispers. "Weather? Waiter? Father? Daughter? What... what does he want?!" Then suddenly an albino dog sprang to its melanin-deficient feet and dragged its own dog water tin over to Beaner. He stared down at the gelatinous mass decorated with unrecognizable floaters. Dropping his face into the tin he drank the whole thing down in one long, slow gulp. Not that he wanted to, mind you, but by now it was so full of doggy goober that it was essentially one big doggy boogie, and once it started to go down, there was no stopping it. Dog goobies, with the consistency of aloe vera gel and the smell of dog 'nads, have miraculous healing powers and Beaner was back to his old self in no time. From that moment he knew that this was the dog for him.

"Perdòn me, ma'am," he said in his heavy Mexican accent to a passing woman in a pretty white dress. He had caught her by surprise, and she looked flustered as she stared deep into his eyes. He was used to this. He had something in his eyes — a sparkle his mom always said — that caught women's attention. "You've got something in your eyes," she said with wonder, staring intently.

"Jes," he said blushing, "My mamà, she say they