

The Town and the Place, Ray Bradbury

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At first, A Thousand Times Great Grandmere said, there was only a place on the long plain of grass and a hill on which was nothing at all but more grass and a tree that was as crooked as a fork of black lightning on which nothing grew until the town came and the House arrived.

We all know how a town can gather need by need until suddenly its heart starts up and circulates the people to their destinations. But how, you ask, did the house arrive?'

The fact is that the tree was there and a lumberman passing to the Far West leaned against it, and guessed it to be before Jesus sawed wood and shaved planks in his father's yard or washed his palms.

The tree, some said, beckoned the House out of tumults of weather and excursions of Time. Once the House was there, with its cellar roots deep in Chinese tombyards, it was of such a magnificence, echoing facades last seen in London, that wagons, intending to cross the river, hesitated with their families gazing up and decided if this empty place was good enough for a papal palace, a royal monument, or a queen's abode, there hardly seemed a reason to leave.

So the wagons stopped, the horses were watered, and when the families looked, they found their shoes as well as their souls had sprouted roots. So stunned were they by the House up there by the lightning-shaped tree, that they feared if they left the House would follow in their dreams and spoil all the waiting places ahead.

So the House arrived first and its arrival was the stuff of further legends, myths, or drunken nonsense.

It seems there was a wind that rose over the plains bringing with it a gentle rain that turned into a storm that funneled a hurricane of great strength. Between midnight and dawn, this portmanteau-storm lifted

any moveable object between the fort towns of Indiana and Ohio, stripped the forests in upper Illinois, and arrived over the as-yet-unborn site, settled, and with the level hand of an unseen god deposited, shakeboard by shakeboard and shingle by shingle, an arousal of timber that shaped itself long before sunrise as something dreamed of by Rameses but finished by Napoleon fled from dreaming Egypt.

There were enough beams within to roof St. Peter's and enough windows to sun-blind a bird migration. There was a porch skirted all around with enough space to rock a celebration of relatives and boarders. Inside the windows loomed a cluster, a hive, a maze of rooms, sufficient to a roster, a squad, a battalion of as yet unborn legions, but haunted by the promise of their coming.

The House, then, was finished and capped before the stars dissolved into light and it stood alone on its promontory for many years, somehow failing to summon its future children. There must be a mouse in every warren, a cricket on every hearth, smoke in the multitudinous chimneys, and creatures, almost human, icing every bed. Then: mad dogs in yards, live gargoyles on roofs. All waited for some immense thunderclap of the long departed storm to shout: Begin!

And, finally, many long years later, it did.

The End