

Payback (The Chair)

by Foster Trecost

My pace suits someone my age and given an established weakness for distraction, the walk requires forty-five minutes. There's a time when it would've taken less but long-gone are youthful scoots down the sidewalk. These days, kids weave by with agility I never knew. They don't seem to mind a relic lumbering in their path, even one with a chair strapped to his back.

My mother always brightens when I enter her room, then allows a sallow nature to overtake the short-lived smile. It's as if she expected someone else and disappointment sets in when she sees it's only me. I sit next to her bed, which also serves as sofa and dinner table, and easily hide her hands within mine. Her bones are brittle so I'm careful, and her skin reminds me of late fall leaves. I massage her hands with lotion before moving on to her hair. She used to lick her fingers to smooth unruly patches of my hair and sometimes I do the same to her, though not often. Stylist is missing from my long list of endeavors, but by the time I finish she looks ready for the ball.

I tell stories of when we were all together. I confess to inventing a few, but mostly they're the same stories I've told before. Still, I tell them as if for the first time and she listens like she's hearing them for the first time; in a way, she is. Sometimes I get the smile that greeted me, but mostly she just nods. After lunch I make tea with water barely warm enough to steep. She sips with thin lips and the tea is gone within a few minutes. Things that once seemed to last longer now pass with a quickness never known before.

I kiss her forehead and say I'll be back in a few days. She has no concept of time, but I say it anyway. When I walk in, she'll smile like she knows me and for those few seconds, I believe she does, which makes the minutes that follow even more difficult. I strap the chair to my back retrace my steps toward home.

The walk back takes more than forty-five minutes because I'm tired and distractions aren't so easily overcome. Kids continue to

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overtake me, then one stops to ask what's with the chair. I'm not sure how to answer, though I know the answer: for many years this chair bore my weight. Now that it no longer can, I bear the weight of the chair. But I don't say that, such lessons are wasted unless learned firsthand. Instead I say at my age, one never knows when a rest might be needed and it's nice to have a place to sit just in case.

The answer satisfies him, but not me, and I'm left to wonder if I should've told the truth. Maybe one day.

