

## The Rocker

In the back of the garage behind a tangle of forgotten toys sits a rocking chair in disrepair. The old girl's veiled in spider webs and memories. She watches the door hoping someone will lift it, wade to the back of the garage, and settle into her seat, but no one comes.

The rocker watches through a dusty window as time passes. Apple buds burst into blossoms. Tiny green apples sweeten becoming heavy and juicy. The weather cools, and wind carries off the withered leaves. Soon snow drifts against the window blocking the light. In the darkness the chair listens as the wind whistles through the cracks. The rocker wonders if the sun will ever return.

She waits.

Useless, She grumbles. My only job is to keep stacks of books off the floor.

The chair struggles to remember the feel of gentle rocking or the pleasure of a rubdown with lemon oil. She remembers, but it's like looking at faded photos.

Years ago, a farmer built her for his wife out of an oak tree he had cut down with his own ax. For years babies cuddled in their mother's arms as she had rocked. The chair soothed generations of babies until the great, great granddaughter wanted something new and shiny. The family gave her to a traveling fiddler who oiled her and put her to work outside his camper.

The the old rocker creaked with contentment as the fiddler's guests rocked to the beat of his music. When it came time for him to move, he tied a gigantic gold bow to her back and presented her to his aunt.

The rocker remembered. Aunty roared with laughter when the dogs clowned. Some days the grandchildren came and Aunty leaned in to catch every word. Other days she tugged weeds and watered. In autumn vegetables grew plump, and Aunty plucked them, Pots of soup bubbled on the stove. Cans of beans, jars of pickles and preserves lined the shelves.

Winter came and Aunty's son moved the chair indoors. Then they watched the snow dance on the wind as bread baked in the oven. The seasons passed, each one a treasure.

But then Aunt Blanche passed away, as people eventually do. The rocker sat empty and ached for company. Finally, someone

stuffed her into the garage. She hoped new people would visit, but day after day, no one came into the garage.

A sound interrupts her thoughts.

The garage door creaks open and a man in a flannel shirt props it up with three old boards. A curious breeze flips through some magazine pages and plays with the spider lace. The man pushes in a dumpster. He reminds her of Aunt Blanche, her grandson, perhaps. His efficient hands box up magazines piled on the floor. Each box taped closed and labeled.

A woman's voice calls him to lunch. While he's gone a sunbeam sneaks in and lays across her seat. Delicious, thinks the chair.

She watches the sunlight flood the garage and then fade away, Fascinating. The old girl dozes, waiting for the man's return.

Shadows stretch across the driveway and he begins to sort through the toys. He flings broken trucks and dolls into the dumpster. The rocker grows mildly queasy. A cracked blue teapot disappears into the dumpster. Oh no, Auntie loved that teapot with its red dragon.

Finally, the man stands in front of her with a thoughtful look.

He sees me. What is he thinking?

His fingers trace over her curves. He sighs, lifts her gently and walks toward the door. Off to my new home, she thinks. But he turns and tosses her into the dumpster and then drags it outside.

The old girl is too stunned to think.

Night floods into the alley.

Slowly, it occurs to her, I'm useless trash.

Then the gate clicks. Two hands wrestle her out and carry her back into the yard where a pleasant breeze carries the scent of jasmine.

"Such a beautiful night," says the grandson's wife as she pats her pregnant belly and sits down. The rocker agrees. The pair rock together until morning.

"We can't throw her away. Aunt Blanche loved that chair," she says.

"I bought you a new chair that doesn't creak."

"We must find her a home," she responds.

Soon the chair sits on the front lawn smelling of lemon oil. A sign hangs from her front: "Free To A Good Home"

Neighbors stop to admire her craftsmanship, but everyone agrees she squeaks like a rusty hinge, so no one takes her.

Some one will want me.

Trash day rolls in. The rocker wakes to the sound of the trash truck. Its motor roars as it clutches and whirrs closer. The rocker wishes for feet so she could run away. She doesn't see Max whizzing down the sidewalk on a silver scooter. He loses control and crashes into a dumpster. A bump swells on his head as tears flow. Only the rocker sees him cry.

I hope someone comes, she thinks. I wish I could help.

The clatter draws a crowd. Neighbors pop out of their houses. Twins wearing pink overalls peek over their fence. They recognize Max from school. Mrs. Schwartz, a retired nurse rushes out with her first-aid kit. She invites the little boy to sit in the rocker while she checks for injuries.

"Wow!" says the boy. "This chair has an awesome squeak."

Soon Max's grandpa comes.

"Can I take the rocker," the boy asks.

"Too old and noisy," says the grandpa.

Oh drat, thinks the rocker. Almost.

The rocker sits on the lawn for three more days. Max and grandpa stop in front of her as the boy rides his scooter. "Please may I have the chair?"

"No!"

"I'll do my homework without reminders."

Grandpa shakes his head.

"I'll remember to brush my teeth."

"I'll clean up my Legos so you won't step on them and hurt your feet."

Wow! this kid really likes me, thinks the rocker.

"I'll feed the dog."

"I'll pick up my socks."

"I'll eat broccoli."

T"I'll go to bed the first time you tell me."

"I'll remember to put the lid on the glue bottle."

"No!"

"Please! Please!"

"No"

"Please! Please!Please!"

The rocker thinks she she sees a softening in the grandpa's face. Her hopes rise.

“Nope!”

“Please! Please! Please! Please!”

The grandpa’s ears turn bright red.”No! Not ever! It’s not going to happen !”

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The very next day the rocker finds herself in a new home. The boy and the grandpa are reading together as they rock.

Lovely, thinks the rocker.

From the bottom of the rocker comes a loud and joyous squeak.