

THE OLD CHAIR



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They were exhausted. They had been cleaning and organizing for nearly six hours. It was astounding to Brian and Angie that they knew nothing relevant about the old couple's lives. They had been neighbors for almost fifteen years and close, or so Brian and Angie thought.

"They never mentioned any family?" Brian asked as he reviewed the papers on the old man's desk.

"Brian, how many times do I have to answer the same question?" Angie replied, exasperated. "I know they had no children, but neither mentioned any family."

"No brothers or sisters?" Brian continued, baffled. "No nieces or nephews?"

Angie ignored him. She didn't know the answers to the questions a month ago when

the police knocked at the door asking if they knew the couple who died next door. She didn't know the answers to the questions the police asked her about whom they should contact. She didn't understand why she and Brian were willed the house when a lawyer contacted them after the couple's death.

Over the years, the old woman had helped her through some difficult times. She took Angie to her first AA meeting when Angie's drinking was too much for her to overcome alone.

The old man invited Brian over, and they sat by the pool, sometimes talking but mostly just sitting while Brian brooded. Brian wasn't much of a talker, and neither was the old man. As Brian was leaving, the old man put his hand on Brian's shoulder. "All marriages have their ups and downs. The thing to remember is why you fell in love with her."

"She makes it so hard sometimes," the admission escaping Brian before he could stop himself.

"That's why it's important to remember," the old man said softly. "So, you

can fall in love with her all over again. This will pass, and you'll both be better off going through it together because it won't be the last one. Something else will come along. It always does."

And it had. Brian was proud of Angie's sobriety, but he couldn't help the feelings of anger and resentment that flared up later.

"I don't know what to do," Angie cried to the old woman. "He's angry and distant. Being with him is so hard when he's like this."

"Love him through it. He's feeling the fear he denied himself when you were fighting your demons," the old woman advised. "He'll return to you when he understands your love isn't going anywhere."

And he had. Now, they worked through the office, packing away things they didn't know the value of. A life lived revealed in snapshots, post-it notes, insurance policies, and legal documents.

"I just don't understand why they left everything to us," Brian said again, more baffled than anything else.

"Brian, for the hundredth time, I don't

know!" Angie replied.

But we should have known, they both thought guiltily.

They were going through another rough patch. The distance between them seemed to be a chasm too wide to traverse. Their marriage didn't need the stress of unraveling the mystery the old couple left them. Closing the book on a life lived for decades took a lot of work, and Angie wasn't sure her marriage would survive the task.

"Wow, look at this!" Brian exclaimed.

"What is it?" Angie asked.

"A box filled with letters," Brian said, pulling a large, ornate wooden box from behind the desk. "But they've never been opened."

Angie took a pile of letters secured by a rubber band from him. Brian held another pile in his hand.

"They're addressed to each of them," Angie said, looking from her pile to his. "From him to her and her to him."

"They wrote letters to each other but never read them?" Brian asked, surprised.

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Brian and Angie looked at each other. Did they dare? "Maybe they have some of the answers we're looking for," Angie offered.

She sat in the overstuffed brown chair next to the desk. Brian sat at the desk. They started reading.

"She suffered another miscarriage," Angie said, pain in her voice.

"What's the date of that letter?" Brian asked.

"January 4th, 1982," Angie answered.

"It was her third miscarriage," Brian said, looking up from the letter he held.

They glanced at each other.

"He wanted to leave," Brian said halfway through another letter. "July 15th, 1986."

Angie looked at the date on the letter she pulled from the pile. "She knew. What does he say?"

"That he's sorry," Brian summarized. "He was devastated after learning they couldn't have children. She pulled away from him, and he didn't know what to do."

"She felt she failed him," Angie replied, scanning a letter she held. "She couldn't give

him the one thing she knew he wanted—the family neither of them had growing up."

"He says she was the only family he ever wanted," Brian whispered. "But he didn't know how to comfort her, to make her realize how much he loved her. He thought he'd lost her."

"She recognized her regret was a wedge between them," Angie replied, tears in her eyes.

"They bought this house," Brian continued. "They wanted a fresh start. A dedication to their love and recommitment to the marriage."

"This chair was the first thing they bought for the house," Angie sighed. "They put it next to his desk so she could be with him."

"She kissed me, sat in her chair, and all was right in my world," Brian read from a letter.

"They met us!" Angie read.

Brian grabbed another letter. He remembered they met the old couple in 2002 when he and Angie moved in next door.

"He says that I love you as much as he

loved her. He recognizes it in the way I look at you," Brian said.

"She says the same about me," Angie replied softly.

They gazed at each other. Angie sat in the chair she had seen the old woman sitting in as her husband worked. Brian remembered the old woman's tinkle of laughter as the old man said something amusing while he sat at the desk, smiling at her. Angie stared at the chair, running her hand along the plush arm. She looked up at Brian as his hand met hers.

The letters contained everything the old couple had left unsaid. They wrote about things that needed to be released but not revealed, leaving them behind in unopened envelopes. By freeing themselves of the past, they found their way back to each other in a love story that not even death could bring an end to, and the old chair witnessed it all.

The last letter was addressed to Brian and Angie.

If you are reading this, you know we see you in ourselves. Learn from our mistakes because we lived an extraordinary life together. We were

meant to love each other, just as you are, so trust us when we promise that it will be the greatest love you will ever know and that it will be worth every minute you invest in each other. That's the secret to true love; it weathers every storm to find a safe harbor.

THE END

A b o u t t h e A u t h o r

This story first appeared in the Florida Writer's Association Collection of Short Stories, Volume 15. In December 2022, a friend who asked about a comfy old chair in my office challenged me to write a story about it. So I did!

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Lynda R Edwards-Author

From the Author of:

Redemption Songs

Friendship Estate

Here's a song to get you into the mood of
this book.

The Old Chair by David Gray

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