



The Chair

Linda Bell

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(Upper II)



Crimes Against Literature

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Crimes Against Literature

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*“Old empty chairs are not empty in reality;
memories always sit there!”*

Mehmet Murat ildan

A Note about Chairs

The armchair featured on the cover was photographed at Sewerby Hall, Bridlington. Most of the furniture in the Hall is on loan from the Victoria & Albert Museum and has been carefully chosen to recreate the interiors as they appear in photographs taken in the Hall's Edwardian heyday.

Note : this is *not* the armchair that features in the story!

The Chair



"She's asleep, doctor," said Nancy, as she tiptoed into the room. "Shall I wake her?"

"No, no," said Dr. Nevison hurriedly, "I want a word with you." The doctor was a stout, middle-aged man with grey hair, and he looked quite distinguished in the grey suit that he wore.

Nancy was a slender woman about thirty-five years of age, who wore her hair in a neat bun at the back of her neck. The room was dimly lit by the glow from a dying fire and the light from the oil lamp that Nancy was carrying. By the fire was a bed upon which an old, feeble-looking woman was lying. This was Mrs. Blanchard, who had been an invalid for fifteen years. Nancy, her niece, had nursed her faithfully for most of this time. A few plain items of furniture were in the room, among which a beautifully upholstered antique chair looked strangely out of place.

The two talked together for some time about whether Mrs. Blanchard would be able to enter a private nursing home. The doctor had tried before this to persuade Mrs. Blanchard to enter the nursing home, because he believed that she needed skilled care and

attention, and he knew that Nancy would welcome a chance to join her husband, whose work had recently taken him abroad.

The main obstacle to Mrs. Blanchard's entering a home was her lack of money. She had sold her few shares, drawn out her savings, gradually disposed of every piece of jewellery, to send money to her son Tom, who had left home some years before and wandered around the world getting into trouble. The last time they had heard of Tom had been six months previously, and his demands on that occasion had reduced his mother to a state of near penury.

"Strange that she should be so short of money, though," mused the doctor, "I always understood that your late uncle left her a small fortune in uncut diamonds."

"Well, I always believed that, doctor, but we've never been able to find any trace of them, and she certainly hasn't sold them with her other things, or I should have heard of it," replied Nancy.

"Strange," repeated the doctor. "Strange, too, that she hasn't sold that big chair with the other things : it would bring a tidy bit of money at the salerooms."

"I don't know why, doctor, but she refuses to part with it and never allows anyone to sit there. I do know that she did the embroidery for it herself many years ago—wait ! I think she's waking up."

They crossed to the bed, but Mrs. Blanchard seemed to be still asleep. The doctor felt her pulse and said that he would call the following day. Nancy left the room to show the doctor out. But no sooner had the door closed than the old woman raised herself in the bed, muttering distractedly.

"They mustn't, they mustn't. No, no, my poor Tom. I shan't let them. Poor silly boy, going away like that and leaving your mother. But I've thought of you all the time, Tom, and I've saved you something for when you come home again, and no one's going to take it from you. Not even to buy me a few comforts in my last days. Tom, Tom, why don't you come home ? I must find a way to give you them"

The old woman opened a drawer in her bedside table and took out a pair of scissors. Heaving herself off the bed with difficulty, she tried to walk towards the chair. Before she could reach it the door opened and Nancy came in.

"Auntie ! Whatever are you doing out of bed ? And with the scissors, too ! Here, you'd better let me have those."

"No, no—I must—"

"You must get back to bed, that's what you must," said Nancy decisively, and hurried her back into it. Mrs. Blanchard lay back weakly on the pillows, but clung to the scissors for a little while longer. But at last she gave

them up. Nancy put them on top of the chest of drawers.

“That's better now. I'll go and get you some tea and then I'll tell you what the doctor and I have been talking about,” she said, as she straightened the bedcovers.

The old woman lay still after Nancy had left the room, but her voice ran on in a low murmur, talking to herself.

“What I've saved for him all these years. If Nancy knew she'd say why don't I use the money for myself. Well, she's not going to know, she's not going to sell them, they're yours, Tom. If I can only get them before she sells the chair ”

After Nancy had tucked her in for the night, Mrs. Blanchard lay awake until she heard no further sounds from Nancy's room. Then she edged herself out of bed, little by little, until she had both feet on the ground. Holding on to the furniture, she began to make her way to the chest of drawers. She collapsed before she reached it.



Next morning, when the doctor called, Nancy told him how she had found her aunt on the floor.

"Perhaps she heard us talking of selling the old chair," said the doctor. "But I don't see how that would upset her so."

"She was up before, you know, doctor—oh, doctor, quickly, will you look at her?—I think she's——"

The doctor rushed back to the bed and felt the lady's pulse. "Yes," he said, she's passed away. Not altogether unexpected, after the shock she received last night. A wonder she didn't die then—no, now don't distress yourself, Miss Nancy, you certainly couldn't have kept awake all night—here, we'd better cover the face."

Even as he pulled up the coverlet there came a shout from outside. The doctor went out to see who it was and returned with Tom, a tall, lean man of about 25, his healthy tan in striking contrast to his shabby light-coloured suit. He looked at the bed, pulled the coverlet down for a few seconds, then replaced it.

"So I'm too late, doctor. It took me all these years to get back, and I'm too late."

"There was only one thought in her mind and that was you. All you ever did was ask her for money and worry her with your troubles, and still she wanted you back—don't ask me why!" With these words, Nancy left the room hurriedly.

"The house and furniture will, I expect, pass to you," said the doctor. "Are you intending to settle down here?"

“Settle? No,” said Tom shortly. “I’ll sell the lot and give Nancy half, I suppose. Can’t very well do less. How much will there be left in the bank ? This illness will have run away with a lot, I suppose.”

“With all there was, I’m afraid. You will have the house, of course, as I said. Are you sure that you will want to sell every one of your mother’s possessions ? That chair, for example : your mother embroidered the seat of it herself—would you sell that ?”

“Oh, Nancy can have that if she likes.” But Nancy would accept nothing but the small provision made her in the will, the chair went to the salerooms with the rest.

It fetched quite a good price, but of course, nothing approaching its real value.



About the Author



Best known for her breakthrough appearance in E. C. Axford's riveting drama *A People Apart*, Linda Bell (Upper II) went on to write the top ten Amazon bestseller *Grandma's Guide to the Internet*.