

## **The Chair by Una McGregor**

‘They’ve left the chair!’ Chris called from the lounge.

I was still exploring the kitchen cupboards. I abandoned that and rushed in to see, afraid of missing out on discovering our new house together, and found him reclining with his hands hooked behind his head, elbows jutting out like wings.

‘Look, Jenny. It’s a recliner!’

‘I can see that.’ I laughed.

‘I suppose we can use it until we get something of our own. But seriously - that carpet has to go!’

I grimaced at the sludge green Axminster adorned with huge bouquets, the colours vivid where once there had been furniture, but tired and wilted where the light had faded them. There were moth holes in the hollows where the legs of furniture had rested. I shuddered slightly,

‘It’s cold in here, let’s open the windows and get some fresh air in. I’d swear it’s warmer outside than in.’

I flung open the window and let in the warm, scented spring air.

‘Come on, you can’t sit around. We have to get the van back before five or we’ll end up paying for another whole day.’

We were like children at Christmas, so excited moving into our first house. It was a probate sale and the old man’s family were glad to sell at a price we could afford as they didn’t want to do any of the updates or modernizing it needed.

We explored the rooms amid coos and wows, laughing and grinning and nudging each other, deciding what should go where from our accumulation of boxes and meagre items of furniture, and anticipating how it would look when we had made our mark.

We had lived in a rented flat which was partly furnished so only had a few bits and pieces of our own so far, and some donations from our respective parents' homes.

Still, it took a couple of hours before the van was empty and returned. We scrubbed the kitchen cupboards and stocked them with our food and utensils. We cleaned the bathroom and constructed our bed. Only then could we settle down with a fish and chip supper and a toast of Prosecco, Chris ensconced once again in the 'new' chair.

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'Not that rubbish again!'

I pressed the button on the TV and sank into my armchair. I couldn't stand those soap operas. Betty was always putting them on but I liked the sport, or at least a funny game show or quiz. Not that University one, though. How was anyone expected to know all that stuff? Or the other one with the black chair. Who'd know about Bhuddism or French History or whatever? Even the General Knowledge is too hard for normal people.

'Could do with a cuppa, Betty.'

She sometimes needs a hint, but I was soon settled watching that new show, Blankety-Blank, with a nice cup of tea and even a biccie.

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The very next day we set to work. We had taken a whole week off and planned to use it working on the house. The Broadband was installed and we set up the TV and computers.

By the end of the week we were hoping to have a pleasant room to sit in and a pleasant room to sleep in. We made a start on the master bedroom. Having set ourselves up in the spare, we removed the dated wardrobes and made a couple of trips to the dump. We stripped wallpaper, filled holes and painted the room in a cheery primrose.

Everything was fun. We worked together and laughed together and learned together. We Googled 'how to' and watched YouTube

tutorials. We read reviews for the best products and went to the DIY shop selecting paints, scrapers and brushes.

Each evening we retired, exhausted, to the lounge, with our easy dinners – plates of pasta or jacket potatoes – to gen up on DIY and browse websites for decorating inspiration or furniture ideas. Sometime we just flopped in front of the TV, too tired even for that.

‘What’s that you’re watching?’

I asked, as I glanced up from my computer.

‘I thought you were looking at power tools?’

The music like a heartbeat, rising in tempo and pitch, had distracted me and we watched as a man holding a metal ring passed it over an electric wire, his hand shaking, until the buzzer screeched and the glass box he was in flashed red. We both exhaled.

‘What *is* this?’

‘I don’t know, I thought I had put the news on?’

Chris pressed the remote and the serious face of the newscaster appeared.

‘Sorry. I must have hit the button when I put the remote down,’ he pulled a confused face and sat back.

I shivered and put my hand on the radiator, which was warm.

‘This really is a cold room,’ I said and turned up the thermostat, before going back my furniture website.

It happened again the next night. Mastermind was on and suddenly it wasn’t. It flicked over to football. But the controller was resting on the arm of the chair. We hadn’t touched it.

‘How did that happen?’ I asked.

‘Maybe the remote needs new batteries or perhaps it got dropped in the move?’ We were both confused but shrugged it off.

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‘That bloke gets on my nerves.’

I heaved myself out of the chair and pushed the channel button. Loud pop music, I pushed again and heard the familiar laughter of a game show. That would do. She sighed and picked up her puzzle book. She does that every time I change the channel.

‘He’s so smug, with his garden makeovers. Why can’t people do their own gardens anyway?’

I sat back down into the chair. ‘Friday night. A little beer would go down well, Betty...’

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On our last night before work, we ordered a takeaway and sat down to watch a movie. We chose a Rom-Com, something we didn’t have to concentrate too hard on. Suddenly, the TV went off. Forks half way to our mouths we froze. We looked at each other, bemused.

‘What happened...?’ I was just asking when it popped back on. The Netflix connection had been broken, but then the TV channels scrolled, stopping at Match of the Day 2. We couldn’t believe our eyes. We looked at each other again and burst out laughing.

‘That was amazing!’

‘What was that about?’

We were confused and amused in equal measure. Chris put the film back on and we continued eating and watching. Until a moment later the TV went off again.

The room was suddenly cold.

This time we were not laughing.

We looked at each other and glanced around, as if someone might be there, pranking us. But no. Chris put it back on again, settling for something on mainstream and we finished eating in silence.

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‘She went on a Tuesday, did Betty. I didn’t know she was that bad. She complained sometimes, and kept going for appointments, but I thought she was just making a fuss. I felt bad then. Maybe I should have taken more notice. Then the kids came. I heard them muttering in the kitchen, scheming. They arranged for these dinners to be delivered. I had to heat them in the microwave. They were ok, but not like she made.

They bought a new telly, with one of those controllers. It meant I didn’t have to get up to change the channel. There were more channels too. Much better – more sport.

They got me a new chair. I just had to pull the lever and it reclined. Sometimes I didn’t go to bed, just pulled one of her knitted blankets on and slept there. I couldn’t tell the kids that. They’d probably have got some home-helper to come and put me to bed, but I didn’t want that. It’s where I was when I went too. I didn’t see it coming.

I just couldn’t get up with the pain in my chest, so reclined there. The telly was on all the time. I couldn’t even change the channel. It wasn’t long before they found me; they checked up on me every couple of days. Then they cleared everything out.

Only my chair was too heavy, what with the reclining levers and all. So I stayed in it. And now there’s these others. New folk. Younger than our own kids. They keep watching those history programmes and stupid films and those flipping specialist quizzes. I’m not putting up with that though. Over my dead body! Ha-ha!’

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We had the TV checked and bought a new remote but it kept happening. Sometimes I’d come home from work and it would be on –Tipping Point, Fifteen to One, snooker, The Chase. I’d hear it as soon as I opened the door. Sometimes it would just change when we were watching a programme. Or simply switch off. And that room

was cold. I frequently got the shivers. Even Chris admitted that he felt it too.

We didn't even stay for a full year. We had updated the kitchen, decorated the rooms and replaced the hideous carpets. We didn't really talk about it at first. After that first rush of enthusiasm we both sort of knew that we didn't want to stay there. It was spooky.

So we didn't put our heart and soul into it as we thought we would. We just made it nice. We made a good profit and put an offer in on a nice older house with a garden, not too far away so we could still commute. It's somewhere we can renovate as well, and we know better what we are doing now.

So the removers are coming tomorrow. We can't manage just hiring a van as we have more furniture now. There are wardrobes and a chest of drawers, a spare double bed and some book cases, the dining table and chairs. We have a comfy sofa and coffee table and Chris's reclining chair.

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