The Rocking Chair

Margaret Brunson Rees

Heaven only knows how long I have sat unused in this place! I know it has been many years, I can tell thee. Oh, I am sorry to confuse thee, I do not hear people use the plain language anymore. But where I came from that was all I heard, so thee will have to excuse me. The folk who pass by me in this museum do not talk as I am accustomed to hearing people speak. The dear old caretaker dusts me with his grey cloth daily, and keeps me shiny for them to see me at my best.

Thee does not yet know that I am a straight back chair with rockers. I should also tell thee that I was born years and years ago as a straight back chair. Elijah Wiggins was a young man when he made me, along with other pieces of furniture for his bride Elvira.

They lived in a small log cabin, and did not need much to make them happy. He chopped down the huge cherry tree near his home to make a sturdy four-poster bed and dresser. Then with the scraps, he pegged me together and made me into a handsome chair with curved slats at the back.

I was happy to be with them, for they were pleasant people who took pardonable pride in their possessions. Then one day, I heard a new sound. Crying. But it was not Elijah or Elvira. It was their first-born, Samuel. And he was laid in a new cradle. He was so tiny and added so much to the happiness of this pioneer couple. Nevertheless, Elvira had no place in which to rock her son, except in the cradle. She longed for a rocking chair such as her mother had. So she asked Silas, the carpenter, to make me into a rocker.

But Silas was a deaf-mute, and could not understand exactly what Elvira wanted. She showed him Samuel’s cradle with its curved rockers, and asked that I be made to look like it. He did his best, even if he could not hear her, and he made rockers on me that stuck out as far in front as in back. Sweet Elvira had not the heart to tell him these were not what she wanted. She rocked Sam’l, and I have remained thus ever since.

Sam’l grew up and married Phoebe, who looked prettier in her grey Quaker garb than anyone else I have ever known. One day all their belongings were put on a wagon, and we travelled miles over mountains until we came to a new settlement. Before long I was needed for rocking a baby again. Daniel was their little boy’s name. He was born soon after they were settled in their new cabin. They had some other babies, too, but though Phoebe did her best, the epidemic of diphtheria took them all but Dan’l. There was so much sadness in the community when the pretty Phoebe lost her other children to this sickness.
When Dan'l was a man and ready to take a wife, he married Sarah. She was a strong-willed woman who demanded a new house and modern furniture. The old cherry bed and dresser which had been my friends were put in the attic along with me. I don't know much of what went on in the rest of their fine house, for I sat neglected in the attic most of the time.

A little girl with long, dark ringlets came up to the attic sometimes and sat on my frayed splint bottom. She put things into the drawers of the dresser, too. Little things like rustly taffeta and bright pieces of paper. I felt sorry for this dear, troubled girl. I knew she was unhappy. Oh, yes, she always had the same plain grey frocks on, but when she fingered the red silk ribbons tears would run down her checks. She tied her long curls up and sobbed as she looked into the mirror on the cherry dresser.

The bed, the dresser and I did what we could to make her happy when she came to see us in the dark attic. We tried to comfort her when she told us about her father, the good Dan'l, being killed in the Civil War. Then she would imitate her mother talking to her and scolding her for wanting to wear pretty clothes. That was the way the other girls dressed.

Thee has no idea how young Clara must have struggled within herself to please her mother, for all the time she wished to be beautiful, too.

Thee can be sure Clara did not forget us three, when she got married. We were now called "antiques," and she took us to her rambling frame house. She became much happier living with George Graves and ceased to wear the somber grey she had grown up hating. She was lovely with her dark shiny hair, and she wore bright red as often as she could. They had two babies, but, as there were other rooms in this house, I did not see much of the children after they were a year old.

One day Clara and George took a trip with their children. They left us alone for a long time, and when they returned, George did not come back with them. There was a lot of talk about tuberculosis and Arizona and widow's weeds.

Clara moved to another smaller place with her son and daughter, and I was put in the attic again. Here it was very hot part of the time. I was very uncomfortable in the newspapers that she had tied around my graceful ladder-back.

Many years later her son and daughter, now grown, took everything out of the attic. Virginia took the cherry dresser and bed away with her, but she and her brother decided to put me here in the museum.

I recognized the building right away as the old Hicksite Friends' Meeting House which Clara had been forced to attend with her mother and father. She had told me about the Quaker meetings held here, but times have changed. It is now the museum for the Wayne
County Historical Society. The kindly caretaker took the yellowed papers off my cherry back and put me where everyone could see me. I must have looked a sight, for he spent several days going over my rungs and putting a new cane seat on me. The heat had been hard on my finish, too, but I look as good as new now. He keeps me polished even though no one sits and rocks on me anymore. The visitors just walk by, look, and laugh at my odd shape. They think the rockers are funny. The rockers, that stick out as far in front as behind, put on me so long ago by the man who had never heard of anything like that except on cradles.

October Afternoon
Miriam Burrell

The bright October sunlight flooded the huge windows across the front of the restaurant. Mary Andrews, wearing a white coat, with the sun streaming through her blond hair, sat with her back to the light.

At a table across the room near the cashier’s cage, John Fowler thought she looked like an angel. His eyes remained on her steadily, as his hands made methodical movements with his bread and his soup spoon. There was a peaceful, quiet look on his face as he stared at her.

Behind his serene face, John Fowler’s mind was moving with incredible speed. He noticed all the people in the restaurant who did not see him, who did not recognize him, who did not know who he was. He recognized the irony of the situation . . . the people who could sit here in this restaurant with the Son of God only steps away, and not feel His presence, yet he forgave them their lack of spiritual awareness. And all the while his mind recognized that this girl, who was the object of his gaze, was an angel.

The girl was rising from her chair now, slim and lovely, her short white coat belted tightly at the waist. She began to thread her way gracefully between the tables toward the cashier’s cage. John Fowler’s hands remained motionless as he gazed at her. She couldn’t have been older than twenty. As she drew close to him, his face softened with a compassionate smile that was almost spiritual in its purity. Surely she was an angel.

The girl was looking at him . . . she . . . she was smiling back at him.

Her smile went deep into John Fowler’s mind, deep, deep, down to a little boy who had once cried piteously for recognition; and spiraling upward again into his thoughts of now, it enriched and made generous his spirit. Yes, yes, she was an angel. She would share his glory. He would bestow a rich and full share of his glory upon her. His look of compassionate love deepened to an intense glow.