Sitting

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Sitting

My grandfather spent his life in chairs
In the time before the hemorrhage stunted his right side,
the chairs he sat on were at construction sites, inside equipment cabs, at the head of the dinner table.
Now the chairs are scattered throughout the house that he constructed, tucked away in corners,
built up with orthopedic pillows, levers, and mechanics.

He struggles to reach each seat now, dragging his dark brown shoe across the floor,
making a sound like wet sand under the sole, grating against the bleached planks of a boardwalk.
With my grandmother at his arm he swears inaudibly, in brisk huffs, and she asks him not to
curse in front of the grandkids. To me he turns and winks.

Her white hair bobs with the weighted steps, transverse, uneven, but still powerful
in their timeless determination. She brings cookies and lemonade. Handing them to the patriarch on
the throne for half a man. The chair rocks forward.

The light burning through the window’s film of condensation warms the room and his rocking chair,
sinking into the oak, melted pools of butter around the still solid joints.

A room away she is putting the handheld mounds of white sugar, egg, and vanilla back in their place.
I help by pushing his chair to the edge of the counter, my makeshift stepping stool. She tells me
that her ears are ringing. “It means someone is talking about you.” She looks toward the hall.

In two days I will leave for the West; for Oklahoma where the wind spirals and destroys.
Where the land is so close to the water table, construction crews abandon basement plans.
I will spend a month away from home in a city named after the state, where the southern drawl
seeps into the skin like the red clay, rubbing off with the steam of a bath.

I will send postcards from the memorial. I will take pictures by the Survivor tree and walk
along the fence hidden under a quilt of woven photographs and yellowed paper, coated in the red
of Oklahoma and the white of bombed concrete. I will sit beside, not on, the chairs by the granite pool.
Ghosts or tombstones that glow a warm bronze, tempered glass squares in rows,
some scaled smaller, seating for a child’s tea party.

On the morning of, people rushed across smooth yards of concrete and up the granite landing,
toward the revolving doors that minutes later would be shattered, the building strewn across the yard
like the contents of a women’s fallen purse. The survivors crawling through a mushroom cloud of dust
and sound, stumbling over broken concrete, holding their ringing ears, bleeding noses, desperate faces.

In a month and two days I will return to the glazed window, to my grandfather’s broken half.
To the table at his good side I will place a postcard of the cold squares built for those who left
seats empty on earth. At desks, dinner tables, in dusty try-to-forget corners.

My grandfather will look at the chairs and then at his own, his lap and hands wrapped in light
and he will call for my grandmother to help as he leans the chair forward.