

2022 Wind & Water Writing Contest  
Honourable Mention  
FICTION/NON-FICTION

More than garbage

By Paulette Rothbauer (Fiction)

The two plastic chairs thumped her spirit so hard all she could think about was loss. Just two cheap white plastic chairs. They bought them years ago at the grocery store during the summer they moved out here for good. Now, they are just sitting there at the edge of the back field: side by side, listing together, discoloured, and layered with dirt. Not much more than garbage. They will be there for a long while, sinking into the earth. Something for the new people to ponder when they find their way out back. She sighed, not sure how she felt about that.

Turning away from the chairs, she smiled a bit as she looked out towards the farthest point. First contemplating the southeastern tree line that had changed so little in forty years, again the playground of this year's crow family. Next, the small field that was for a long time a steady source of hay. Not much good for anything else, not that the hay hadn't brought in some good money. The field is dotted now with young scrub. Trees so tender you could sauté them in butter.

Slowly, she eased herself into the most upright of the two chairs. How often the two of them moseyed out here with their gin and tonics after a day of labouring outside: cutting the grass, tending the gardens, keeping things tidy. They'd sit here in the shadow of the trees as the sun went down. Towards the end never saying much as they clinked their glasses together.

When they were younger—she supposed they were middle-aged then—they would rest and talk and argue and laugh out here. The chairs, the back field encircled by trees, they made a space away from the daily living in the house; away from the desperate gardens, the workshop; away from all the places where there was always something that had to be done, all the work, all the trying. As much as she missed it, she was glad that was not her life now.

Despite the chairs, the back forty was falling back to nature. She could sit out here at dusk and watch the dog as she scrambled over the coyote highway, auditing the comings and goings of all the other animals. She'd leave her inside sometimes just so she could sit in the shadows by herself to watch the erratic deer, the steady gambol of the huge raccoon with her family trailing behind. Once she saw the beaver try to drag a stray birch volunteer across one edge of the field down to the creek. She'd root for the bunnies at the same time as she marveled at the owls. She would take her time walking around the field to spy all the minis – the mice, the voles, the moles, the snakes, the odd wayward frog – insistent chatter of the red squirrel following her.

She heaved herself up out of the chair. She took a deep breath and could just catch the smell of the new neighbours' bonfire down the way, wafting over on a faint breeze. She closed her eyes, tilted her head back, and for a minute listened to the coyotes call to their pups. She made her way over Jim's old bridge, took one last look at the creek flowing down to the mill pond. Onward to the house, to where the last load was waiting in her truck.