

## **When the Porch Chairs Come Back by Charles**

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There is a certain day every year when you realize the town has put its chairs back outside. Not folding chairs for a parade or a cookout. I mean the ordinary chairs. The ones that live on front porches, at the edge of driveways, beside garage doors, or near the front walk where the afternoon sun lingers the longest. One week they are not there. The next week they are everywhere.

You do not see them arrive. They simply reappear, as if they had been waiting all winter for permission.

I noticed the first one this year outside a house on a side street I drive through often. A plain wooden chair, nothing special about it, set just far enough from the front door that someone could sit comfortably and watch the street without feeling like they were blocking the entrance. Two days later there were three more on the same block. By the end of the week it felt as though the whole neighborhood had quietly decided it was time again.

Porch chairs change the pace of a town.

When people sit outside, they notice things. They see who walks by with a dog that is getting older. They notice which kid has suddenly outgrown last year's bicycle. They wave to someone who has lived three houses down for 20 years, but whose schedule never quite lined up with theirs until now.

You cannot do that from inside.

Winter encourages us to keep moving. We arrive home and go straight indoors. We close the door and settle into the evening. Spring invites us to pause again. Not for long stretches, necessarily. Sometimes just five minutes before supper. Sometimes long enough to finish the last of a cup of coffee. Sometimes long enough to watch the sky change color without quite meaning to

Those chairs make that possible.

When I was younger, it seemed as though there was always someone sitting outside somewhere along the street. Not every house. But enough that you never felt alone walking past. There was usually someone who would nod, or raise a hand, or ask how things were going even if they did not expect a long answer.

That kind of presence is easy to overlook until it returns.

I passed one house the other evening where two chairs had been placed side by side near the front steps. No one was sitting in them at the time, but they faced the road in a way that made it clear they would be used soon. A little farther along, someone had set a single chair near the edge of a driveway where the late sun reached just before disappearing behind the trees. Down the block, another chair rested beside a small table that looked as though it had held a glass of iced tea not long before.

None of these things were remarkable on their own. Taken together, they made the street feel open again.

A porch chair is a small declaration. It says someone plans to be outside for a while. It says the day has stretched enough to make room for sitting instead of hurrying. It says the neighborhood is not only a place we pass through, but a place we share.

I always like the week when the chairs come back. It means the season has turned in a quiet but dependable way. And it means that before long, someone will be sitting in one of them, watching the evening settle over the street the same way people here always have.