Shim

by John Wentworth Chapin

He lay on his side for a moment, catching his breath, assessing the damage to his body and the small sitting area next to his bed. He didn't have a real living room anymore; he'd had to select just one piece of furniture to bring with him to this facility four years earlier. He had sighed when he made the choice: *better than being dead.*

He'd been hobbling past the end table and had put his hand out for balance. The table tipped, and he went with it. He wasn't hurt badly, but the pain was starting. He sighed: *better than being dead.*

He'd made this table — decades ago, couldn't really remember if he'd been a young man or an old man. One of its legs had splintered in the fall. He saw the culprit: on the floor under the table was a folded-up piece of paper that had been keeping the table level. One of the legs had always been too short.

He reached with bruised arm to grab the paper, unfolded it, saw that is was a postcard: a tropical beach. He didn't recognize it. He flipped it over. Nothing was written on the other side, and he didn't have his reading glasses to decipher the tiny print. He didn't know where it was from, who'd bought it, why, anything.

He sighed.