

The Things I Don't Unpack

By: Ellevia

My backpack sits where I left it, slouched in the corner of the room, exhausted. Like it's tired of carrying me.

Never questioned what is inside or noticed at all. That's the best part. Looks like an ordinary backpack but the weight can be unbearable. It's not what is physically in the backpack that weighs me down but the unknown objects that lay deep within it that no one else sees. When I was young, I used to think backpacks were made to be bright and colorful, made to stand out but I see that differently now. I want to blend in.

It's always with me, thrown over my shoulder, resting on the chair next to me, or even in the back seat of my car.

People assume that my backpack holds what everyone else does. Mine does in fact carry all of that but more. It holds something that I am unwilling to take out in public.

I don't let them see.

Inside is packed tighter than it should be. Almost bursting at the seams and worn out. Even though a physical backpack can be replaced, this one can't. If it bursts open, everything might come spilling out.

I don't let them see, that can't happen.

Because once people see inside, they ignore the regular stuff. They see me differently. Softer, Fragile. Like I'm something that might crack if handled wrong. Their voices change. Their eyes linger too long. They begin to calculate each thing they say in their head.

I hate that part more than anything.

So, I keep it buried deep down.

Instead, I learned the weight I will carry the rest of my life. The way it presses against me, like a reminder that it's there even if I pretend it's not. Something I would like to leave behind somewhere and pretend it was never mine.

But it will never not be mine.

And maybe that's the art I am finally starting to understand.

Because this—this hiding, this tightening grip on the straps, this constant pretending— it isn't how it's supposed to be. Carrying something doesn't have to mean burying it. This backpack isn't meant to stay sealed forever. It's meant to be opened, used, seen for what it holds. Not pitied. Just understood.

There are moments, small ones, where I wonder what would happen if I let the zipper slide open just an inch. Not enough for everything to spill out, just enough to breathe. Enough to prove that what's inside isn't something broken— it's something managed. Something lived with. Something that is mine.

I don't know if I am ready for that yet.

But I think about it more now.

About how it would be to not have something keeping me down. To be free from the burden of holding everything in. To feel how it would feel to not have everything constantly contained. It isn't just something I carry— It's something that carried me. Something that made me who I am.

Something that has made me see life as something more than struggles and hardships. It showed me that the days I didn't think I would make it through, I did. Through moments where the weight felt like too much until it wasn't. Instead of throwing it over my shoulder, I adjusted the straps and kept going.

Then I realized that maybe the backpack wasn't the problem.

It's the silence around it. The fear of it being unzipped. The assumption that if people knew, they'd only see weakness instead of the effort it takes to stand here and bear it, looking like everyone else.

Every day, everywhere. Like it doesn't hold anything important. Like it is empty.

But sometimes— just sometimes— I loosen my grip on the straps.

And it feels a little less like hiding and a little more like me.