

She carries her life on her back, wrapped carefully in a large sheet of canvas that doubles as a tent when it rains. It climbs up her shoulders, past her head and droops over, almost in front of her eyes. She has to replace the sticks to prevent it from swallowing up her head twice a week. When she gets into the next town, she promises herself, she'll buy some tin rods and see what she can do to reinforce the sagging canvas. She's debating buying a lantern to hang in front of her, off the bag along with all the other things she hangs off the bag. Sometimes they'll bump her butt repeatedly, leaving an unpleasant bruise for her to discover the next day if she isn't smart about where she ties what or if she's in a rush because another of her old foes has tracked her down. She ties what she needs to access quickly except for the boot, which she hangs off the back of the bag.

The bag extends behind her almost a yard. It makes her taller by a foot and three inches. It makes her two feet fatter from the back. It is stubbornly attached to her by a long strip of leather that rubbed her armpits raw for a week before the calluses grew out of the scabs. She tries to carry the weight on her hips but that requires her to hunch forward and she feels like an old woman when she hunches over so all the weight rides on her shoulder, much to the detriment of her lower back.

It is rare for her to lose her balance anymore, but at first, when she was still weak, the bag would lean to one side and she'd find herself unable to pull herself upright. She would lie on the scorched earth like an upside down turtle and struggle to right herself without taking off the pack. She refused to cry, though she came very close on the 37th failed attempt to stand on the 14th fall. She still feels ashamed about that.

There are five changes of clothes, 15 socks, three coats of varying thickness. She carries four blankets, though she usually only needs two of them. She has a small stove but she ran out of fuel two days ago and she's considering using the extra sticks she was saving for the next time she needs to prop up her pack for tonight's fire. She has five days worth of food left but only three quarts of water.

She claims to be a pilgrim and as such carries nothing useless that is not holy or cannot be sold except for the boot, which is the singular sentimental item that hangs off her back. She refuses to explain what the boot means to her because she knows in some places pilgrims are expected to be celibate (she doesn't know which places do and which don't). Her being a pilgrim is only a half truth and she doesn't need to attract any more attention. Perhaps because she is insistently barefoot no matter where she wanders, no matter where she goes someone always asks or makes a joke about the boot.

It pains her to be unable to give them a straight answer. It weighs much more heavily upon her mind than it does on her back but she can't bear to part with it. Of all the regrets she carries, the boot is the worst, and she takes comfort in the boot alone.

The heaviest thing she carries is the thick wood frame she wraps the canvas and leather around, weighing in at over fifteen pounds. The lightest thing she carries is a small trinket that most consider holy but that she thinks of as nothing more than a marble. She uses it as leverage because she knows how others feel about it. She keeps her relics and her money in a silver box, one foot by six inches by five inches. She keeps the things she sells, by far the one thing that makes her bag so large, in a burlap sack that once was meant for laundry.

Each night she lays the pack on the ground and unties the long ropes that hold it all

together and makes her camp. Each morning she wakes as the sun rises and hopes there wasn't a rain in the night. If everything is dry, she packs up within fifteen minutes and makes her way to the next town.