

# 03

## The Chair

A jolt in my body woke my mind to stiff arms and legs. I couldn't move, my limbs were pulled back behind me. My neck was immobile, I was utterly restrained.

"Help! Help! I can't move my body," I screamed, but my voice turned to smog and drifted away.

I was tucked but erect under a table. Peering between the legs, this reminded me of when I was a child. My great grandmother, referred to as "Little Gramma" because of her short stature, would throw parties for her twelve children, their children, and their grandchildren in her tiny house. She had a redwood dining room table that appeared too large for the space, with ornamental legs and a thick clear finish.

I would push through all the legs of my relatives to the basket of toys she had under her radio stand. I would grab all that my arms could hold and then crawl underneath the table. I'd spend the remainder of the party observing the legs and feet standing just past the lace tablecloth that draped over the edge.

Little Gramma would wear black leather shoes with chunky heels, just feminine enough for the time in which she lived. Her swollen ankles would pour over the edges underneath her nude toned pantyhose. She would often wear red and black, and most of the interior of her home was also decorated in red and black.

My mom wore a purple dress for formal gatherings when I was a kid, with purple high heeled shoes. At this time, she was a real estate agent and conformed to those aesthetics. It was rare to find my mom in a dress much after that.

My dad would wear black leather loafers with laces tied in a small bow to the inside of his shoes. Anytime he would tie footwear he would rest his ankle over the lap of the other leg, which explained the off-centre tie. His pants had a perfect crease ironed down the front. This was something my dad learnt from his mother.

The light grey pants were the pants I wanted to stay away from. That was Uncle George, he had a knack for making everyone feel uncomfortable. I'd see his

legs approach the table and everyone else's legs would clear away. Before every family gathering, I would ask my mom if Uncle George was going to be there. I was terrified of him, which was probably why I was under the table.

Little Gramma had this old camera that she tossed in with the kid's toys. When you pulled back the lever and hit the shutter button it would make a click sound, even if there wasn't film in it. I would pretend to take photos of people's legs and feet.

As I listened to the sounds of the crowd, they would become a sound entity that embodied all the voices together. My mom's laugh would always pierce through. It didn't matter how long I'd be under the table, there was no way I would leave.

Now I am under a table again but naked, and this time I can't move.

*Eeerrrrkkk*. Click. Someone walks through the door to the left of me.

I rush to shout, "Help! Please sir, I can't move," but he doesn't respond.

He just wipes the remains of outside on the mat. I can't tell if he is ignoring my voice or if he can't hear me. He takes off his trench coat and hat, then hangs them on the hook by the front door. His hat is an unusual hat. In many ways it looks like a classic fedora you'd see on Gene Kelly in the film "Singing in the Rain," except it also has a mask that covers everything but the eyes and nose. I know this because the front door is far enough away from me that it is within my peripheral vision.

His feet and legs approach me. He drops his keys on the surface above me.

He walks over to a yellow phone that hangs on the wall. There are not any numbers to dial out. He picks up the receiver and speaks nonsensical toneless words. Moments later he hangs up. He then stands staring at the phone while scratching his leg. He begins to shake it as if he is a dog, then turns and walks toward the kitchen.

Blood begins to soak through his pant leg where he had been scratching. His black tie and white collared button-up shirt fall to the floor behind him. I then begin to hear the *clinking* sound of a belt buckle undoing and the *zip* sound of leather feeding through it. His pants drop to the floor, and he steps out of them. He then takes off one sock while hopping into the kitchen.

He bends over and opens the cabinets under the sink. If it were not for the

overgrown hair drooping between his rear crack and scrotum, I would be seeing his squinting anus. I need to count my blessings. He exerts himself by pulling out an old rusty toolbox. The sink above has been leaking and pooling around the base. A decaying print remains where the toolbox sat on an old piece of wallpaper.

There is a *clank* above my head as he thrusts the box onto the table above me.

I begin to question whether this is a dream. Can I even dream? I begin to think about all the different dreams I have had. I remember one where I was in my wooden highchair that matched our kitchen dining room set. Just as I begin to look around the remembered room, my mind is pulled back jarringly.

He jolts my body from under the table and spits on my face. I shout, “What the f-,” but before I can finish the word “fuck,” he plops a suction cup dildo over my mouth and nose. I can’t breathe. He then pulls a rusty can of motor oil out of the toolbox, cups his hand, and pours some into his palm. He rubs his hands together. He then begins to simultaneously lather the dildo and his erection.

*Splish, splash, sploosh.*

He forces the overused sex toy into his posterior opening. He slides up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, and up and down. There is dead silence juxtaposed next to the squelching of his motor oil. I beg in my mind for him to finish. I begin to project arousing thoughts from my mind just to get him to finish sooner. I hear a shallow beeping. The more it beeps, the more aggressive his motions are performed. The room begins to spin, and everything goes black.

I wake up and the room is pitch black, except for the flickering light on the back of his neck, accompanied by a soft *beeping* sound. I can breathe again.

I drift in and out of sleep listening to the beeping until the front door begins to *thump*, stunning me back into my prickly reality.

The intrusive sound yanks the man out of his sleep. Still naked, he slips on a robe with black lace that peeks out of the bottom. He peers through the peephole and rapidly mutates to an alarmed stiff corpse. He unlocks the latch and opens the door and then simultaneously crosses one hand fistted against his chest and the other covering his eyes.

He chants to his visitor, “Merciful patron of human purity, much obliged for

gracing me with your presence. How may I devote my existence to you today?"

The intruder walks in as if he owns the space. He drops his coat to the floor, which bumps my leg and appears to be made of human hair and skin. My jaw drops. The right lapel of his jacket is an embroidered emblem shaped like a phallic tower standing on a supine human form. He slowly touches the surfaces of all the objects in the room as he walks toward the refrigerator. He opens the door and pulls out an unlabeled bottle, pops off the cap, and lets it fall to the floor. He thrusts his head back, filling the room with the sound of *gurgling* chugs. When he reaches the bottom of the bottle, he lifts it up and stretches out his tongue to catch the final dribble.

"Jiminy Juniper, we have found that you have been in violation of section 4.9," the intruder claims, "do you know the retribution for such a violation?"

"Yes, sir," Jiminy responds.

"There is no room for this violation in the third quadrant. Your reprehension will be discussed further with the Ministry of Emotions and we will provide you with our ruling upon our return," says the intruder, who appears to be an officer of this foreign world.

Jiminy picks the jacket up off the floor and folds it neatly on his arm. Then, returning it back to the officer he says, "I look forward to your return."

Once he shuts the door behind his visitor, he turns towards me, pulls me out from under the table and sits on me. The weight of his body on mine is too much. It feels as though I will buckle. Between his legs I study my surroundings for help.

I look up under the table and realize this table is not a table. It is three humans connected to form a table, just like me as a chair. It is in this moment I realize the obscurity of my existence. I begin to shout, "Can you hear me? Can you help me? What is going on?"

No one can hear me. I begin to peer around the room, and I realize it isn't just us. The walls, the floors, the doors, the windows, everything was made from human beings.

I had heard about this in the old world, but I did not think it would ever happen. There had been a group of radicals trying to blackmail the government with breaches of information for changes in laws. The radicals were spraying hydrofluoric acid on people in the streets who did not follow their human

conventions. Anyone that fell outside of white cisgender power was brutally marked and deformed. This was an act of rebellion to establish complete conformity.

I do not think I know anyone that believed these people would get away with it. The last I heard, the government was establishing a lawfulness movement that would centralize these new convictions as a resolution for climate change. I realize that the world is now arrested, being harvested as furniture and shelter—except for who appears to be the elite?

Now that the Ministry of Emotions officer has left, Jiminy sits on me blankly for an hour. He gets up and walks over to his old record player. He lifts the pin and places it onto the vinyl track. The light at the back of his neck begins to flicker. The 1977 Supertramp album, “Even in the Quietest Moments...” plays track one.

I know this because as a child I always loved feeling the sun shining on my face in the backseat of the family van. A place we all felt safe, despite my dad’s bad driving. My dad had a Supertramp collection, it may have been the only collection he had in the van. I would sing along, “Give a little bit, give a little bit of my life for you.”

I would often say to my dad, “Guess what?”

It was a game we would play. One of us would say, “Guess what?” And who ever said, “I love you,” the fastest, loved the other person the most. When my dad was driving, my seat was always behind him. He would look up at me and smile with his eyes through the rear-view mirror. He would always cup his plump dry hand and reach it behind the seat. This was his “low five,” a way for him to connect to my touch when his heart missed me. When he was not driving, he would say, “high five,” with his hand raised up. He would then say, “low five,” then, “on the side,” then, “on the roof,” and he would finish by poking my nose saying, “you’re a goof.” I never left him hanging.

As quickly as the sound of the song drifted me into my memories, I am yanked out of them by the prickly hairs of Jiminy’s bare rear as he pulls me out and sits on my face. He smells like a combination of sweaty socks and stale cigarettes left in an ashtray for far too long.

He starts to shake, which I quickly realize is him tossing off. He begins to rabidly moan with relentless rhythm. This sound foreshadows my daily fate for the next couple of months being his chair. Eventually he cocks and ejaculates on my face.

It feels like warm embryotic fluid being sucked out of my lungs but in reverse. *Bling... Bling*, the phone rings. He walks over to it and stares but does not answer.

*Bling... Bling*, the phone rings again. Then in the distance I hear the click of a mini cassette tape beginning to rotate. A voice emits from a box across the room. It says in a monotone voice, "You have reached the residence of..." then a deep voice, that resembles Jiminy's, interjects saying, "Juniper Residence." The monotone voice returns saying, "Please leave a brief message after the beep" ...*BEEP*.

Then, behind a muffling static, an absorbed feminine voice says, "Jiminy love, are you alright? I heard that you got a visit from the emotion police this afternoon. Please do give me a ring back to assure me you are safe. Take care, bye-bye then."

The light on his neck begins to flicker again. He walks away from staring at the phone and sits back down, on my face, to finish his sandwich he made the day before.

Listening to his music, he is on track three titled, "Even in the Quietest Moments." It begins with the tweeting of birds that escalates to an acoustic guitar and a centralized mesh of hollow instruments.

He sings along, "Even in the quietest moments I wish I knew, what I had to do. Even though the sun is shining, I feel the rain."

*Bling... Bling*, the phone rings again. He jolts me out. He walks over and lifts the receiver and says in a droning voice, "Hello," as though there was nothing left in him but feelings of defeat. He clears his throat and says, "I mean hello!" in a corrected and uplifted voice.

The voice on the other line is too soaked up by the distance to be heard. He says, "Yes Madeline, that is correct." He then repeats, "Yes Madeline, that is correct." This time he begins to scratch his neck.

He says with an absence of emotion, "Madeline this is not a good time." He then shouts, "Madeline please!" Then suddenly, the red light on the back of his neck turns black and starts to make the sound of tweeting birds. He slams the receiver down.

The light on the back of his neck begins to sing the song from 1954 singer/songwriter LaVern Baker, "Tweedle Dee."

It sings, “Tweedlee tweedle tweedle dee. I am as happy as can be. Jiminy Cricket, Jiminy Jack. You make my heart go clickety-clack.”

It appears this song is playing as an attempt to neutralize the emotions being felt. To revert him back to a happy place or absence of emotions. It seemingly has a reverse effect on him as a cobweb of sounds swells throughout the room, between the record player and the device on the back of his neck. The more he hears the “Tweedle Dee” song, the more he begins to pant and sweat. He scrapes at the blood out of the scratch on his neck. He sits back on my face and salty sweat drips into my mouth.

He sits until all the sounds expire. Then he goes to lay in his bed.

The room is dark. Darker than the normal darkness under the table. The days have become countless. I have lost all feeling in my fingertips and toes. Any sensations that I can still feel are agonizing. The only relief I have is to drift asleep. Although they are always grim sleeps where the helium of my dream is pierced by the sharp torment of reality. I begin to question what is harder to escape — a dream or reality?

I must be so exhausted because just as I begin to wake up, I finally drift into a dream long enough to sustain a moment. I am surrounded by long dry grass in a big open field. There are 12,603 different pathways. I am naked, laying on a cold metal surface with my arms stretched out. It is as though I am bound to a crucifix.

My body is pulsating, I have lost all control. There is a blinding light above and the mumbling of a doctor’s voice. My insides are outside. I hear a gurgling cry that wakes me, shifting my alertness from dream back into reality. Or was it from reality back into the dream?

The state of shock still lingers, I can feel my body eating away at my muscles. I cannot hold this position any longer. Am I standing or sitting?

The limits of my desperation force me to obsess over a way out. I imagine being a chair that can walk. I imagine going into the bathroom, finding pills, and swallowing them one by one saying, “One pill, two pills, three pills,” as though counting sheep.

Why am I being tortured? Because I like the taste of vagina, or I don’t know my gender? Now I am confined to being a chair, what does it all matter now?

I am at my maximum and I cannot contain my emotions any longer. I begin to

wonder if my emotions can break through this chair. Can I fracture it? I just need a small crack to pour out. I begin to shriek; it is time to express everything. I simultaneously pop both of my ears.

With relentless force I begin to shift my weight back and forth, forward, and backwards, and diagonal. Every which way I can. Then suddenly a *creak*, and one of my feet shifts. I cannot believe it. Is this a sound mirage? So, I do it again. *Creak*. Jiminy rolls over in his bed.

This feeds my hope for a sense of liberation. I use this newfound faith to do it again. I thrust, I push, and I pull. I teeter onto one of my hind legs. I think that maybe I can fall over, so then I can roll. I succumb to exhaustion.

I begin to realize that Jiminy is having a particularly off day. The bags under his eyes are drooping below his knees.

He goes into the cabinet and pulls out an unlabelled can. He opens it with his can opener. It begins to jam. He lifts the can opener off the track and repositions it. He then tries to turn it once more, but it jams. He takes a large butcher's knife out of the drawer and jams it into the holes of the existing cuts and pries off the welded lid, warping it open.

He takes a saucepan out of the bottom cabinet and places it on the stove element. A chunky yellow soup plops out of the can and splatters into the pot. He turns the knob to the highest temperature it allows him. He stares at it while silence inflates the room.

Steam begins to exhale from the pot. Then seconds later, I begin to hear it bubble.

His overweight naked body stands there staring at the bubbling soup. The knife dangling in his right hand and his stomach hanging over his genitals. With one swift heave he slices his stomach open horizontally. His organs begin to fall like slippery Jell-O. They pile on the floor in front of him. Just before the soup begins to boil over, he turns off the element, takes the handle, and pours it into his stomach. The heat turns his bones and muscles to vapor, and his skin is left to fall to the floor.

This horrific sight rips away any hope that I had left.

Now I watch his body rot. It takes weeks before he is found. I watch the flies swarm in. I watch the rats feed their families. I wonder, what were they more drawn to? The flesh or what I assume to be chicken noodle soup?



The smell of chicken soup through the air reminds me of how hungry I am. I look at the soup and my mouth drips. As the days go by and the body rots, the soup remains desirable.

One day, there is a crow at the window, and he won't leave. He peers through the glass at the remains. It is as though he can smell the flesh through the glass. He taps at the glass incessantly. *Tap, tap, tap.* He doesn't give it up. He devotes two days to this.

Then finally, it begins to crack. The tempo of his tapping becomes more rapid, which threads an opening. He must be starved after all this work. Which makes me think of my own hunger and how the smell of the soup is so hauntingly alluring.

After many hours of him working away at this crack in the window, he squeezes his head through. He repeatedly thrusts his body into the opening, starting to bleed from cuts by the edges of the glass. I can see the dark blood dripping down the wall. With a loud *Crock!* he gets in. The sound of him is much louder than when he was outside the window.

He devours his earnings. He pulls apart tendons and plunges his face into organs. He is finally able to satisfy his hunger.

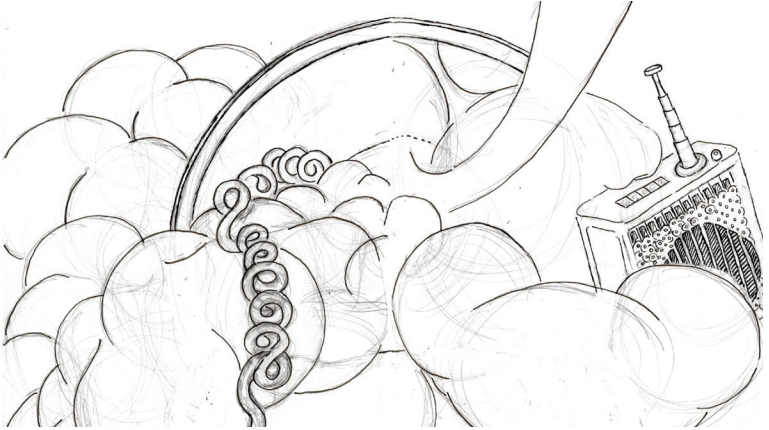
*Knock, knock, knock.* There is a sudden knock at the door. Startled, the crow flies with heft into the hole of the window. Although this time, he is unable to fit because of the feast in his gut. He pulls himself out in mid-air and with all his force smacks into a solid pane of glass. This makes him fall to his death.

*Bang, bang, bang,* the knocking on the door continues. "Mr. Juniper, we can hear you in there. Allow us to gain access to your residence immediately!" This sounds like the same officer that was here months ago.

*Thump, thump, thump, thump.* "Mr. Juniper, this is the Ministry of Emotions, and we have information about your case. Grant us access or we will enter by force," the officer exclaims.

The thudding relents. Finally, I think I hear his boots walk away. But the steps return to the door, and I hear a *click* and *beep*. Then I hear a low deep explosive sound, as though the door is imploding. The door dissipates.

All the eyes in the room shift towards the doorway. The officer walks in, squinting his eyes, with a leather handkerchief covering his nose and mouth.



Toss Off, 2023, Pencil and Ink, 11in x 8.5in

He slides his wallet out of his right lapel, opens it, and slides a slim device out of it. He pierces it into his right index finger. “I am reporting the remains of one Jiminy Juniper. They must be collected in a timely manner,” he reports into the device.

He leaves.

The doorway is left open. I think that this may be my opportunity to escape. I begin to thrust my limbs by shifting my weight, as I had done before. Although this time, I fall onto my side, then my face, then onto my other side. I keep repeating this as though I am a child in the park rolling down the prickly grass hill, smelling the dandelions pressed against my nose.

A series of steps just outside the ledge of the doorway makes me roll much faster. I am moving so fast that I begin to levitate. Then I drop straight down, hitting the bottom of the staircase in pieces, and everything goes black.

I wake up to my face being grabbed. I never thought the size of my face would fit into a stubby plump dry hand. Then this jagged metal rod slides inside of me and turns. Fuck that hurts. I begin to question, where am I? The room looks familiar. More importantly, what am I?

I am a doorknob.

