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IN THE END

by
Ross Peter Nelson

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CHARACTERS

ONE *The guardian of the chair.*

OTHER *A stranger.*

SETTING

A large room with a chair. The floor of the room is not flat, but uneven and uncomfortable. The chair, which dominates the center of the room is a La-Z-Boy style lounge chair. If possible, the lighting should approximate morning-day-evening-night cycles, with the nighttime period highly abbreviated.

SYNOPSIS

Against a surreal landscape, a reportedly carnivorous chair awaits new prey. When a stranger arrives, the chair's self-appointed attendant warns the newcomer away, but the two become entangled in a battle for dominance. The question of who is predator and who is prey unfolds as the stranger and attendant face off in this dark comedy about sex, death, and the mating habits of bees.

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SCENE 1

AT RISE: *The play begins with lights already up, ONE standing by the chair, regarding it, walking around it, sitting. The chair is in the upright position.*

ONE

Getting hungry, aren't you? Too bad.

(Circles the chair while speaking)

Nothing for you here. I suppose I could chop off an arm. Would you like that? Keep you going a little while. Just enough meat there to sustain you until something else comes along. Some dumb animal that you can consume. Blood to gorge on. Oh, you like the sound of that. Blood. Blood. Blood. Hot. Ninety-eight point six degrees. Wine-dark splashes. A lively ruby spray, sweet and essential. Ah, but then it's gone. Gone so quickly. Still, there is the meat. That's where the sustenance lies.

The lights begin to dim.

ONE, *Cont'd*

Well, nothing today.

(Lies down at the foot of the chair)

That's a relief.

Blackout. After a pause, lights come up slowly, revealing ONE sleeping, but now OTHER is in the room as well, standing near the wall.

OTHER

Hello.

ONE

(Stands)

Oh ho. Company.

OTHER

Am I intruding?

ONE

Not at all.

OTHER steps into the room.

The door was unlocked.	OTHER
It happens sometimes. You can never tell.	ONE
I haven't found one for a long time.	OTHER
Hallways.	ONE
Endless hallways. Sometimes I could hear people.	OTHER
But couldn't get in.	ONE
Sometimes I'd wait around, but usually I'd just move on.	OTHER
You look tired.	ONE
I could use a rest.	OTHER
Welcome.	ONE
You have a chair.	OTHER
Yes. No.	ONE
It's been years...	OTHER
It's not mine.	ONE
Whose is it?	OTHER
Besides, I don't find it appropriate to speak of ownership with respect to a living being.	ONE

OTHER
That being being?

ONE
Him.

OTHER
Him?

ONE
Or her. I can't decide.

OTHER
Don't play games.

ONE
Games?

OTHER
The chair. I'd appreciate it if you let me rest.

ONE
It's no game. She's a living creature. Like a Venus Flytrap.

OTHER
And it just happens to resemble a chair?

ONE
Anglerfish have a piece of skin at the end of their dorsal spine. It looks like a little minnow. It attracts would be predators, which then find themselves consumed by the angler.

OTHER
Fine. Whatever you say.

ONE
No one ever believes me.

OTHER
Perhaps I should move on.

ONE
Oh, no.

OTHER disappears offstage. The rattling of a locked door is heard.

ONE
Please.

OTHER returns.

OTHER
May I sit down?

ONE
Be my guest.

OTHER heads for the chair. ONE bars the way.

ONE
Not there.

OTHER
Then where?

ONE
Anywhere.

OTHER
(Quickly ducks around ONE and into the chair)
Ha!

ONE grabs OTHER by the arm and throws OTHER to the floor. Throughout the following ONE stays between OTHER and the chair.

ONE
Idiot. Do you want to end up like all the rest?

OTHER
All the rest?

ONE
Vanished.

OTHER
(Waves arm to indicate the empty room)
It must have been a grand parade.

So it was. Until he took them. ONE

Or she. OTHER

Yes. You know, that would explain... ONE

What? OTHER

A particularly carnal embrace. ONE

You're really convinced... OTHER

I've been saying it all along. ONE

Carnal? OTHER

Carnivorous. Sarcophiliac, if you prefer the Greek. ONE

Come again? OTHER

You studied the Greeks. ONE

No. OTHER

Philia. Love. ONE

Right. OTHER

The opposite of Phobia. Fear. ONE

And Sarcophilia? Love of? OTHER

Sarc. ONE

Of course. OTHER

Flesh. As in sarcasm, flesh-tearing. Sarcophagus, eater of flesh. ONE

Is that what it means? OTHER

Sarcasm? ONE

Sarcophagus. OTHER

You didn't study the Egyptians? ONE

No. OTHER

Didn't study the Greeks. Didn't study the Egyptians. *Le vray étude de l'homme c'est l'homme.* ONE
(Beat)

I know, I know. You didn't study the French, either. OTHER

Business. ONE

The true study of man is man. OTHER

I studied business. ONE

I'm sorry. OTHER
(Pause)

So. You claim that the chair is... OTHER

Flesh-loving.	ONE
That it eats...	OTHER
Voracious.	ONE
...people.	OTHER
Among other things.	ONE
What other things?	OTHER
I don't know.	ONE
But it has eaten people?	OTHER
All of them.	ONE
All of who?	OTHER
Didn't study English, either.	ONE
What?	OTHER
Whom.	ONE
Whom what?	OTHER
All of whom. It has eaten all of whom.	ONE
Oh for god's sake. What's the point of arguing grammar if you're on the verge of being eaten?	OTHER

ONE
It passes the time.

OTHER
And you saw it? Did you actually see it eat them?

ONE
I saw...the results.

OTHER
Results?

ONE
Remains.

*ONE goes to a corner of the room
and returns with what appears to be
a small heap of seaweed-covered
driftwood nailed together.*

ONE
It's kind of like an owl pellet, really. Hair and bones.

OTHER
Not much there.

ONE
Completely dry, not even a spec of marrow left behind.

OTHER
Marrow.

ONE
Soft and sweet.

OTHER
Memories.

ONE
Yes. I remember. Delicate, like butter.

OTHER
No. My mother...

ONE
What?

OTHER

My mother used to eat marrow. Break open the bones, scoop it out onto a cracker.

ONE

So delicious.

OTHER

It confused me. When I was a kid, the bones I knew were solid, permanent.

ONE

Dinosaur scaffolding.

OTHER

Yes. The idea that they were hollow, that there was this soft stuff inside. It didn't make sense.

ONE

But the taste...

ONE, lost in a reverie, lets the heap drop.

OTHER

That doesn't really look anything like a person.

ONE

(Picks up the heap and returns it to the corner)

Wait long enough and it will be dust. Then it will look even less like a person. The flowers that spring up in a battlefield were once people. And people are made of elements that were once stars.

OTHER

Doesn't look like a star, either.

ONE

Still. Fusion. Hydrogen into carbon. Nitrogen. Iron.

Lights begin to dim.

ONE

(Lies down at the foot of the chair)

It's getting dark.

OTHER

Is that safe? Being so close.

ONE

Nowhere is safe.

As lights fade to black, OTHER too lies down on the floor. Pause. Lights begin to come up. The chair is now in the reclining position. ONE is standing over the sleeping OTHER.

ONE

(To chair)

There's not a lot of meat on this one. You might consider leaving me a companion.

OTHER stirs.

ONE, *Cont'd*

Good morning.

OTHER

(Rises stiffly)

Oh, I hate this.

ONE

You get used to it.

OTHER

Look!

ONE

What?

OTHER

It's changed position.

ONE

He's hungry.

OTHER

You slept in it.

ONE

No.

OTHER

Liar. You just want it all to yourself.

ONE

She smells fresh blood.

OTHER

Is yours so stale?

ONE
What do you mean?

OTHER
Why is it more interested in me than in you?

ONE
She. Don't call her it.

OTHER
So why?
(Pause)
If it's so dangerous, why don't you get rid of it?

ONE
Her. No.

OTHER
Kill it. Break it up into little pieces.

ONE
Your parentage is showing.

OTHER
Pardon?

ONE
The primate family tree. Chimpanzees are violent. They go on raiding parties where they literally rip the limbs off of one another.

OTHER
Are you calling me an ape?

ONE
Bonobos, on the other hand, react to threats by initiating sex.

OTHER
Oh, is that what you're looking for?

ONE
Sex?

OTHER
Yes.

ONE
I think about it. From time to time.

OTHER
With me?

ONE
Mostly with the chair.

OTHER
You're just bat-shit crazy, aren't you?

ONE
It's an odd attraction. I think it's more *philia* than *eros*. Still, I couldn't argue that there isn't some carnal desire.

OTHER
Look, you claim the chair is alive.

ONE
Yes.

OTHER
But it's clearly not human.

ONE
No.

OTHER
And you want to have sex with it.

ONE
Maybe.

OTHER
But isn't it a completely different species?

ONE
Don't get around much, do you?

OTHER
Plus it could kill you.

ONE
(*Mock introduction*)
Thanatos, Eros. Eros, Thanatos.

OTHER
More Greeks.

ONE

Do you know why Socrates was killed?

OTHER

Bad breath?

ONE

He claimed that if the gods weren't good, you couldn't really call them gods.

OTHER

No?

ONE

The ability to toss a thunderbolt, rain down frogs, that sort of thing. It wasn't sufficient.

OTHER

All powerful, all seeing?

ONE

Not enough.

OTHER

Not enough to be creator of the universe?

ONE

No.

OTHER

Tough guy, Socrates. What did he have against the gods?

ONE

Their behavior. Having sex with mortals, inciting wars, interfering with the Fates, jealousy with regard to other gods. All the usual things gods do.

OTHER

I guess he had a point. So, who killed Socrates?

ONE

The gods.

OTHER

Very funny.

ONE

Vox populi, vox dei.

OTHER

That's not Greek, that's Latin.

ONE
A glimmer!

OTHER
I was raised Catholic.

ONE
Where?

OTHER
Somewhere. Somewhere. I don't know anymore.

ONE
Is anyone still there?

OTHER
I don't know. I left.

ONE
Why did you leave?

OTHER
It wasn't a conscious decision, really. I got restless. I'd go for walks. Find other rooms.
Wait for them to open.

ONE
You set off into the future.

OTHER
I got lost. I couldn't find my way back.

ONE
And you've been searching ever since?

OTHER
No. At some point I realized I wasn't that invested in finding my way back.

ONE
So you continued to travel.

OTHER
Not really. I fell in with a crowd that I liked and just...stayed.

ONE
And now?

OTHER
I started wandering again.

Why? ONE

I don't know. I felt...something. OTHER

Nausea. ONE

Useless. OTHER

Exit, pursued by a lobster. ONE

What? OTHER

Mescaline flashback. ONE

OTHER
What is it with you anyway? All your obscure little jokes. You're like some kind of intellectual vampire. Poking and prodding. Is this one tasty enough? Anything to be had before I drain it dry? Can't you let me be for a minute?

OTHER stalks off and rattles the door again.

Wait! ONE

OTHER returns.

Is that how I seem to you? ONE, *Cont'd*

Yes. OTHER

I'm sorry. ONE

You treat me like... OTHER

Like? ONE

I don't know. A specimen. OTHER

No. ONE

How about a little empathy? OTHER

I've kept you alive. You should thank me. ONE

Thank you for saving me from the carnivorous chair. OTHER

You're welcome. ONE

(Pause)

Charades? ONE

(Pause)

Is there water? OTHER

Metaphysics! Even better! ONE

Well? OTHER

Is? There? Water? Should we address the question ontologically or epistemologically? ONE

Don't. I'm thirsty. I'd really like some water. OTHER

All right. Cool spring rain, wet, sparkling streams, endlessly changing, splashing, quenching, flowing. ONE

Are you trying to provoke me? OTHER

It's the only water I can give you. ONE

OTHER

I want a drink.

ONE

On the other hand, since it's abstract, it's perfect. Or so Plato would have us believe.

OTHER

Just shut up, will you?

ONE

Actual material water would be only a shadow of Water. Indeed, it could be a disappointment. Stagnant, insipid, foul-smelling, turbid, brackish.

OTHER

Shut up!

OTHER moves to the edge of the room and lies down, facing away from ONE.

ONE

Don't sulk. It's juvenile.

Lights begin to dim.

ONE

(To the chair)

I'm afraid I've made a mess of things. And of course, you're upset because you haven't eaten. Some days there's no pleasing anyone. I'd offer you a dog or a cat, but there haven't been many around lately. I may have a carrot I could share.

(Searches pockets and digs out a turnip)

It's only a turnip. Sorry.

(Lays the turnip on the chair)

You're welcome to it all the same.

(Pause)

To bed, to bed! What's done cannot be undone.

ONE lies down at the foot of the chair. Darkness. A pause. As lights come up, the chair has moved closer to OTHER, who is still asleep.

ONE, *Cont'd*

(Waking; sees the chair and grabs it)

Oh, no you don't. Get back.

*ONE leans over the chair and pushes it back to its original position.
OTHER wakes.*

OTHER
(Sitting up)
Caught you.

ONE
Caught me?

OTHER
I saw you. Getting out of the chair.

ONE
I was protecting you.

OTHER
(Stands)
What bullshit.

ONE
A trick of the light.

OTHER
A shadow?

ONE
A shadow!

OTHER
Or maybe just evidence of your erotic attraction to furniture.

ONE
Impossible. There's no such thing as a shadow.

OTHER
(Points to shadow)
Talk your way out of this.

ONE
That's the floor.

OTHER
And there, the black outline that looks like me?

ONE
That is also floor.

OTHER

That's my shadow.

ONE

What you call a shadow is merely the absence of light. Everything else is illuminated except the place where the light cannot fall. How can absence be a thing?

OTHER

Did you do this to all the others? No wonder they ran off.

ONE

They didn't run off.

OTHER

Oh right, I forgot. They were eaten. They probably threw themselves into the chair and begged to die, just so as not to have to listen to you.

ONE

I didn't invite you.

OTHER

Funny no one ever tossed you to the chair. Perhaps I will.

During the following, OTHER pushes ONE into the chair. OTHER pins ONE down.

ONE

Help!

OTHER

I thought it was your friend, your lover.

ONE

She'll get us both.

OTHER

C'mon, chair. Take a big bite now.

ONE struggles and finally slips away. OTHER collapses into the chair.

OTHER

Oh, that feels good.

ONE

Die then.

OTHER

Ha. If this thing is so dangerous, where's the blood?

ONE

What?

OTHER

You claim it's eaten others.

ONE

Hundreds. Thousands.

OTHER

Where's the evidence?

ONE

I showed you.

OTHER

You showed me twigs. There's nothing here. No sign of struggle, no bloodstains.

ONE

Look at yourself. Look at me.

OTHER

What are you talking about?

ONE

I don't see any blood on you. I assume you've eaten meat. I certainly have. I've consumed my fill of flesh on many a day. Can you see it in my face? On my clothes? Where's the evidence?

OTHER jumps out of the chair, and regards it warily.

OTHER

I don't know why I let you do this to me.

ONE

Finally showing some sense.

OTHER

You suit each other. You're both predators.

ONE

My last meal was a turnip.

OTHER

I wasn't talking about the food chain.

ONE

A metaphor! Excellent.

OTHER

I just want to rest.

ONE

To escape.

OTHER

To sleep.

ONE

Perchance to dream?

OTHER

I always liked that play. I wonder. Is that all that's stopping him?

ONE

Hamlet?

OTHER

Are his dreams so frightening that the fear of eternal nightmares stays his hand?

ONE

I'd almost given you up as a lost cause. But Shakespeare!

OTHER

Is he a coward? Is he afraid of the "undiscovered country?"

ONE

Oh no, he shows a keen interest in "country matters."

OTHER

Come again?

ONE

And again and again.

OTHER

I try to be civil. Why don't you go back to humping your chair.

ONE

It would have to be a civil union.

OTHER

Maybe it would eat you as it eats you.

ONE

Recline-a dentata.

OTHER

You might expire in ecstasy.

ONE

Consumed, like a preying mantis.

OTHER

Or not.

ONE

Or a honeybee whose genitals explode inside his mate.

OTHER

Explode?

ONE

His phallus literally ripped away from his body.

OTHER

Ouch.

ONE

Leaving the she-bee plugged up like a corked bottle.

OTHER

No wonder parents never want to talk about the birds and the bees.

ONE

But it does provide a nice counter-point to Hamlet, doesn't it? To dream eternal nightmares, or to lose oneself in the instant of rapture?

OTHER

Either way, you end up dead.

(Pause)

Get rid of it.

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes