

Meeting of a Man and a Chair

by Warren Goldie

The man strides into the lobby of his employer's law firm, staring raptly down at his new Burberry loafers. His eyes flutter. His shoulders relax.

The receptionist, sitting at her desk, doesn't acknowledge him. She's busy tapping on her keyboard, inserting the letter "Y" into the crossword puzzle on her screen to complete the word "slippery."

This is not a coincidence.

With the man's next step, the strap of his shoulder bag against brushes on the chair beside her desk, catching one of its back posts. To the casual observer, this would appear to be inconsequential.

It is not.

The strap pulls taught, slightly lifting the chair up off the floor.

The man hesitates—exactly as long as it takes for the second hand of his Rolex to lean into its next tick; precisely the sliver of time needed to allow a fruit fly buzzing at the man's ear to elicit the thought of a flick of his hand.

Yet there is no acknowledgement of the fly, nor is there a flick (not surprisingly).

With the man's next step, the strap jumps off the back post, releasing the chair, which bounces down onto the floor with a soft knock that the man does not (bother to) hear.

The fruit fly heads for the chair's back post (we'll never know why).

The man makes his way to his office, his thoughts squarely on the workday ahead.

He takes out his computer from the shoulder bag and sets it on his desk. He does not think about what just happened with the strap and the chair, though he had certainly felt the pull, sensed the added weight and noted the momentary tension and release.

If you mentioned any of this to him, he would laugh. He would stare at you in his haughty manner, for he is far too busy to note such meaningless minutiae.

And yet . . . His mind has done exactly that: absorbed every detail about what had just happened, for it is like a digital recorder lacking an off button. The marriage (and subsequent divorce) of strap and chair post have taken up permanent residence within it.

When the man is sleeping (fitfully), or sipping a martini (tenderly), or dreaming of business success (venomously), or when, many years from now, he is lying in his deathbed in his last throes, the memory of the chair post, the laptop bag, the strap—and all the other “meaningless minutiae”—perhaps even the fruit fly (yes, absolutely, the fruit fly) will percolate up from within him as though from a vigorously boiling kettle.

They will intrude on his awareness. They will announce themselves with the same urgency as any one of the man’s many achievements, which had seemed so important, perhaps momentous.

And yet . . . *That moment.*

That little one. That teensy one. That meaningless one. That was the one—the one that could have stirred him from sleep, that could have introduced him to life in the real world.

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