

Chairs

By Derek Sikkema

NOTE: Each character may be any gender. The names are purposefully ambiguous. Pronouns and other gendered words may be changed.

CHARACTERS

ALEX – Sees the stagehands

SAM – Nervous, living in a revolution of chairs

PAT – Intellectual and clear-sighted, but young and naïve

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS – An agent of the system

SCENE ONE

Living room. Four bay windows. Door at their center. Table center stage. Two couches stage right. Kitchen in downstage left corner with stove and coffee maker. Stairs upstage right lead up. No chairs in the room.

Sam is making eggs in the kitchen. Alex comes downstairs and stops abruptly.

	ALEX
Very funny.	
	SAM
Yes, dear?	
	ALEX
Where are the chairs?	No response.
Did some stagehands collect them?	No response.
Come on, where'd you put them?	
	SAM
I didn't do anything, honey.	
	ALEX
Yeah sure.	
	SAM
I'm making eggs.	
	ALEX
Okay.	
	SAM
You don't care, do you?	
	ALEX
Where did you put them?	
	SAM
Put what?	
	ALEX
The chairs.	

Sam turns off the stove and brings two plates of eggs to the table, eating standing up. Alex waits for an answer.

Sam, you can't just—

SAM

I really wish you'd stop falling asleep in the den.

ALEX

That's not what this is about.

Sam stretches his legs.

Tell me, Sam, where should I sit?

SAM

The den. You clearly like it more than our bed.

ALEX

I like my documentaries. Sorry if I nod off.

SAM

Yeah, you sound really sorry.

ALEX

Well—

SAM

If you were really sorry, Pat would actually come home sometimes.

ALEX

You have to let him go.

SAM

You mean like you did?

ALEX

Where are the chairs?

Pause.

What did you do with the god damn chairs?

SAM

Down at the protest, Alex! Happy now? Do I have to scream at you that I don't want to talk about the chairs?

ALEX

Protest?

SAM

I come downstairs and they're all gathered around the table. They were going to kill us, Alex, I could see it. They saw me and ran out the door. I drove after them, following them to their "protest." It was a riot. I think one of the chairs had an assault rifle. I was lucky to get out of downtown alive.

ALEX

Chairs are inanimate, Sam.

SAM

You seen the chair riots? The chair uprising up north? For God's sake Alex, I haven't felt safe in this house since that chair tried to impale me a couple years back.

ALEX

You know that a stagehand put that the chair behind you, right?

Sam takes his empty plate and brings it to the kitchen.

SAM

You're a real asshole sometimes. And I don't appreciate that language in this house.

ALEX

Honey, I don't know why the stagehands are here but it has nothing to do with politics.

Sam turns around to interrupt.
A stage hand enters, puts a chair outside one of the bay windows, and exits.
Sam freezes like he's just seen a viper.

SAM

Oh God.

ALEX

What? The stagehand?

SAM

The...

He mouths the word "chair."

ALEX

Will you stop?

Sam walks up to the window, feigning a smile.

SAM

Hi! No chairs here. We're not sympathizers. So you can go.

The chair does not respond.

Please don't stare at our house.

The chair does not respond.

We have a gun!

The chair still does not respond.

Alex, talk to it.

ALEX

Talk...to the chair?

SAM

Maybe it'll listen.

ALEX

The chair...will listen?

SAM

Honey.

Alex walks up to the bay window.

ALEX

Stagehand upstage center to pick up a chair, please!

Sam turns his back to Alex, crossing his arms.

The stagehand comes out, grabs the chair, and takes it offstage.

Thank you!

SAM

Will you stop...using...that...language?!

ALEX

What language?

SAM

Chair. You're speaking Chair. Stop.

ALEX

Speaking...chair?

SAM
Only sympathizers speak Chair.

ALEX
Sympathizers?

SAM
You can't have chairs over whenever you feel like it.

ALEX
The stagehand—

SAM
Stop! Do not speak Chair here, Alex.

ALEX
I'm just saying—

SAM
Don't.

ALEX
The stagehands—

SAM
Are you a chair sympathizer?

ALEX
Am I a chair—what?

SAM
Perfect. You're pretending not to know. Stuck in that den all the time. Talking to those professors at the university. No one would ever suspect someone as stuck up and cut off as you.

Alex walks to the table and retrieves his briefcase.

What was that chair doing here?

ALEX
Keep the chairs wherever you put them.

SAM
You shouldn't trust the chairs. If you'd watch the news, you'd know that.

ALEX
Ha. "Chair protest: news at eleven."

SAM

Tear gas and guns don't affect them. The police have to use explosives and other military grade stuff.

He pauses.

Alex, the chairs at Pat's university might stage an uprising.

ALEX

An uprising...of chairs?

SAM

Do you care, Alex?

ALEX

Well, sit-ins have new meaning now.

SAM

Why was that chair here?

ALEX

A stagehand put it there. I don't know why they're putting chairs everywhere, but I know it doesn't have anything to do with revolution. So lie down, and for the love of god, put the chairs back when you get over this.

He exits.

After a moment, Sam goes to the phone in the kitchen and makes a call.

SAM

Pat...come home...the chairs got to Alex.

End scene.

SCENE TWO

Sam and Pat enter through the upstage center door.

SAM

I can't believe these IKEA sets.

PAT

The office chair called campus police. I backed off. They looked at me, you know, the way that only chairs can look at you.

SAM

I'm glad I called when I did.

Pat walks to one of the couches and tentatively sits.

PAT

What do you want me to do about dad?

SAM

Just stay here. You're safe here.

PAT

Not if he's a sympathizer.

SAM

Pat...

PAT

He markets dining room sets.

SAM

Riots in every city. Uprisings at your university and up north. Do these chairs understand that there's no point to all this violence?

PAT

Well, they've been protesting for a while. The rights of chairs haven't gone anywhere.

SAM

What?

PAT

We could've seen this coming. Marx. Hegel. Lenin.

SAM

Still, do we really need a Chair Liberation Party?

PAT

They should at least get equal pay.

SAM

Honey...

PAT

What do chairs get paid for all the nights they sit up with us? Nothing. That's oppression, dad.

SAM

There are people actually oppressed out there, Pat.

PAT

What?

SAM

People living in poverty. They're oppressed. The chairs are not oppressed.

PAT

The chair abandonment rate was over seventy-five percent before the liberation movement started. Of that seventy-five percent, half of them were victims of dust, rot, and eventually collapse. No one even cared enough to even thank them for everything they've done. People were doing unspeakable things on chairs. Sex. Torture. Murder. Imagine being those—

SAM

Pat, please.

PAT

What?

SAM

Those are just token chairs.

PAT

This is real, dad.

SAM

We took good care of our chairs.

PAT

Like dad took care of me?

Pause.

I just know how they feel. Abandoned.

SAM

Alex wanted to be a writer, you know. He had an idea for a book and everything.

PAT

Yeah, yeah, I know.

SAM

He wasn't a great father. But he gave up his dream.

PAT

He's not a great person. He would live in that den if he could.

SAM

I know.

PAT

Why do you stay?

Three stagehands emerge upstage of the back wall, each with a chair. They put the chairs outside the window, facing the house. They exit. Sam jumps. Pat slowly stands.

SAM

Oh my God!

PAT

What are they doing here?

Alex enters, looking frazzled and exhausted.

SAM

Alex—

ALEX

Stagehands...

SAM

—get these chairs away!

ALEX

Stagehands with chairs...

Alex sees Pat on his way to the couch and freezes in surprise. Long pause.

When did you get in?

PAT

Just now.

Pat nods to the chairs.

You gonna do something or go hide in the den?

ALEX

Pat...

Alex collapses onto the other couch.

SAM

Alex, when did the chairs get to you?

He steps up to the bay windows.

Make them leave, Alex, please.

Pat stares at Alex. Alex avoids his stare.

It's a gang!

PAT

Hold on, dad.

Pat turns to the chairs. Alex watches.

Hey. I know what you've been through. I understand how it feels to be abandoned.

Pat glances back at Alex.

Like the only way out is to start fighting. My heart goes out to you, but I can't stand for your cause. We need you more than I think you realize. So I'm sorry, but you need to go.

The chairs do not respond.

ALEX

Chairs upstage left, upstage center, and upstage right that need to be picked up!

The three stagehands take the chairs off stage.

Pat whips around.

Thank you!

SAM

Chair!

ALEX

I am not speaking—

SAM

I know Chair when I hear it!

PAT
I didn't want to believe it.

SAM
How long have you been giving this house to chairs, Alex?

PAT
Dad...

ALEX
What?
Pause.
What is it, Pat?

PAT
Are you a sympathizer?
Pause.

ALEX
Wow. O.K. I thought you were wayyyy smarter than this.

PAT
Of course you're a sympathizer.

ALEX
Why is that?

PAT
Sympathizers are usually jackasses. It's a trend.

ALEX
So a dad who tries to get the best opportunities for his kid is a jackass now?

SAM
The chairs are anarchists, Alex! They attack people at random. Some of them have even started killing.

ALEX
Who told you that?

SAM
Jacob. His mother's chair killed her last week.

ALEX

God damn it, Sam, she had an aneurism.

SAM

That's what the chairs want you to think.

ALEX

My world is blaming its problems on chairs.

He turns to the audience.

This is crazy, right?

SAM

Alex, stop speaking Chair!

ALEX

I'm speaking to the audience!

Long pause.

PAT

You need help, dad.

ALEX

Wait...wait, we've lived here twenty years—

SAM

There's no one there, Alex.

ALEX

No, no, no, I will buy it if you don't see the stagehands for some reason. If you turn around and the stagehands move something maybe it'll look like the chairs are moving themselves. I'll even buy that you think they're staging an uprising...but you can't look out at the audience and say they're not there when they clearly are.

SAM

Alex, there's nothing there.

ALEX

Pat, this is nonsense and you know it.

PAT

You're the one seeing audiences, dad, not me.

ALEX

Think I'm a horrible parent, Pat. Think I'm an asshole. I've earned that. But that audience is there, god damn it! I sent you to that school so that you'd see these things. So you wouldn't fall in line with whatever society told you.

PAT

You sent me to that school to have something to brag about to your friends. You left me all alone, in a place that I didn't know, because your friends said they could get me into an elite university and get me a job.

ALEX

You read Aristotle when you were nine, Pat. You compared him and Plato when you were thirteen. You were good at this philosophy thing. To get a job like the one you want, you need the right school. You're a genius, Pat.

PAT

Don't call me that! Please!

ALEX

What would Aristotle say here? That French guy—Voltaire. That German guy with the big mustache?

PAT

Nietzsche?

ALEX

Yeah.

PAT

You think a nihilist is gonna justify your delusions?

Pause.

ALEX

Fine. You know what? If you're so smart, Pat, guess what? I'm a chair sympathizer.

Alex starts walking upstairs, yammering on.

They deserve a chance at a family and white picket fences and vacations to the Grand Canyon. The inanimate deserve all the rights of the animate. We give rights to whatever we want after all, right? Might as well give them to everything!

Alex exits. Pat and Sam lock eyes slowly.

PAT

You calling an asylum?

SAM

No. We need a Chair Investigator.

PAT

He needs help, dad, not an arrest.

Sam moves to the phone and dials.

SAM

They know where we live now.

Pause.

I'd like to report a chair sympathizer.

End scene.

SCENE THREE

Alex enters from the stairs, looking at the audience. The house is dark. He goes to the coffeemaker and starts it. He leans back on the counter. The coffeemaker beeps. Alex takes his mug. He looks from it to the audience and gestures to the cup.

ALEX

Eh, not enough for everyone.

Sips coffee.

So. My world's blaming its problems on chairs. I hope people are smarter where you're from. It's not the protest, I'm all for a good protest, it's what people are blaming on the chairs. The suspicion. The anger. The violence. We're always the last thing we want to blame our demons on. So we blame them on other things. My world needs people like Pat to stop us from blaming our own violence on...chairs. He needs to see the stagehands. And you. If I question him...as directly as I can...maybe...I don't know.

Sips coffee.

At first I thought this whole house with an audience thing was creepy, but you guys are great listeners. Thanks.

Sudden pounding on the front door.

He'll figure this out.

He downs the rest of his coffee. Investigator Higgins pounds again. Pat and Sam appear at the top of the stairs.

SAM

Alex!

PAT

Why aren't you asleep?

ALEX

Just chair business.

Investigator Higgins pounds on the door again. Sam goes down and opens it. Investigator Higgins steps into the space and flashes her badge.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Investigator Higgins. Federal Bureau of Chair Investigation. We received a call about a chair sympathizer.

Sam points at Alex.

SAM

This is him, investigator.

ALEX

Yes, this is me.

SAM

He says there's an audience out there.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Symptom of progressed chair sympathy.

Investigator Higgins pulls out her handcuffs
and gestures at Alex.

Come here. You're under arrest for chair collusion.

Alex walks over to Investigator Higgins.
Investigator Higgins handcuffs him.

PAT

Dining room marketing...

SAM

You did it for the chairs!

ALEX

I did it for Pat, you idiot! It was the best job I could find when we adopted him.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Chair sympathy is a disease, and I am the cure.

ALEX

Pat, I thought you were a genius. Way to prove me wrong.

PAT

What?

ALEX

Think for God's sake! Specifics! How many years ago did the chair unrest start?

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Three. I remember my first call.

PAT

Four. We learned in Philosophy of Politics.

SAM

It's definitely five, honey.

PAT

I bubbled it in and everything.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

I'm in the Federal Bureau of Chair Investigation.

ALEX

You can't even agree when this started!

Investigator Higgins starts to drag Alex out.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Be quiet.

ALEX

Pat, you're an idiot!

Alex struggles mightily.

You're a caveman tripping in his own drool scratching his own ass and waking up later than everyone else in the tribe even though his alarm mouse went off three times!

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Let's go.

PAT

Why are you saying that?

ALEX

Yes! Why, Pat? Keep asking why! Who was the first chair leader?

SAM

Sir Mahogany the First.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Reverend Oak Rocker.

PAT

Great Old Pine. He started that phrase they're all saying now, "don't sit on me."

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

They don't say that.

PAT

They do.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

I'm at the protests. I would know.

PAT

I'm at the protests too.

Pause. Pat slowly looks at Alex.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

I saw you at the last one. They weren't chanting.

PAT

They were.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

They weren't.

Pause.

PAT

What the...

ALEX

There it is.

Pat runs to the door. Investigator Higgins pushes him away.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Sir, I'm gonna need you to back away from the sympathizer.

PAT

Society's lying?

ALEX

What's moving the chairs? How are they getting around?

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Their legs.

ALEX

Have you seen that? Actually seen it?

PAT

I turn around and they're—

ALEX

No instinct! Think, God damn it, think! You're not an animal!

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

Alright.

She gets Alex in a choke hold and pulls her gun on Pat. Pat throws his hands in the air.

I didn't come for you, sir. But I will take you if I must. The chairs are the greatest current threat to society and they must be treated with the utmost caution.

She stares down at Alex.

This guy. Questioning the government. Questioning me. Questioning reality and basic fact. I'm gonna bring you back to headquarters, now, and you're gonna tell me all about the chairs, got it?

ALEX

Just one more question—

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

No.

ALEX

Why chairs?

Investigator Higgins spins Alex around and aims her pistol at his forehead.

An army of stagehands emerges from backstage, at least ten strong but optimally twenty. They're all carrying chairs.

They put the chairs in a crowd upstage.

They exit.

Investigator Higgins and Sam gasp.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

My God...

SAM

Alex call them off!

Investigator Higgins lowers her gun. Pat's jaw slowly drops. Alex walks up to Investigator Higgins and grabs her collar.

ALEX

Don't come around here again. This is chair territory. Got it?

Investigator Higgins starts backing out the door.

INVESTIGATOR HIGGINS

This is war.

She gingerly makes her way through the chairs. About halfway through the walk, she freezes and drops her gun in a gesture of surrender.

Alex walks to Pat and slaps his shoulder. Sam watches grimly.

ALEX

Knew you'd come to. You're smarter than you know, Pat.

PAT

Dad...

ALEX

I'm sorry you felt alone. That's what genius is sometimes. Still, I'm sorry.

SAM

So you've picked your side.

Alex looks at Sam.

Happy? You've converted our child to anarchy, you sympathizer.

ALEX

Really, Sam? You can't even agree with an agent from the Federal Bureau of Chair Investigation on anything to do with this chair stuff. You're ignoring that so you can stay safe in your delusions?

SAM

We have laws for people like you.

ALEX

You know what, Sam? This is my reality. We've been married twenty years. But there were chairs at our wedding. If you can't see that, you'd better leave.

Sam turns to the chairs crowded around outside.

SAM

Dirty...rotten...chhhhaaaaiiiiiirrrrrsssss!!!!

ALEX
Get out of here, Sam.

SAM
How do I get past your army?

ALEX
I think they're gonna let you go. Just this once.
Sam exits upstairs angrily. Alex lifts his hand-cuffed hands.

God damn—
A stagehand comes on-stage with a key. She unlocks his handcuffs and goes back offstage.

Oh. Thank you!

PAT
Who was that?

ALEX
A stagehand.
Pat turns out to the audience.

PAT
Who are they?
Alex puts his arm around Pat and looks at the audience.

ALEX
That's an audience. They're people. Like chairs, they can be whatever you want them to be. Victims. Rebels. Heroes. Criminals. Just remember that they're still people. No matter what you make of them, they'll always be people. No matter what piece of yourself you decide to pin on them, you can't change who they are.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY