

**Play**  
**A chair thief**

THE OLD WOMAN

It seems to me that I haven't lain down in years,  
that I learned to sleep standing from horses  
at the farm I think my grandfather had.

(To be honest, I don't remember.)

Lying down ties you down, and I want no part of it,  
and neither did the horses, who stood and chewed.

My sister Edna called them "majestic". She was named  
after her aunt, the kind of mistake that made us laugh  
for years at the table. We stopped laughing when she died.

Edna was a simple girl, and I say that loving her,  
but hating her too. She was simple both bad and good,  
she was honest and stupid, and when we were young  
I would point her at a barn and tell her to count to three hundred  
and she would do it. Her aunt Edna, though, oh no,  
her aunt was smart as fire, and I wanted to be her child  
instead of my mother's. My aunt would never call something "majestic"  
just because it was large. I'm not sure she would ever use that word.  
She would think it was a cop-out, a blank.

But Edna believed it, my sister I mean, about the horses,  
and my aunt Edna could never look a horse in the eye.

One smart, one stupid, one name. But was it my grandfather's farm  
or my uncle's or my cousin Gary's, or was it just a trip?  
I'm smarter than I seem, but not as smart as I remember.

I gave up sitting first because it hurt to get up again  
and I am afraid to death of pain. My husband died painfully  
of a cancer of the face. It ate into his skin  
and his muscles all contracted unnaturally  
so that he smiled through the end. It was disastrous.

They say the atomic bomb was the biggest event of the century.

They are wrong.

Sitting was hard to leave behind, especially since

I am an old woman and sitting is part of our birthright.

We're allowed to sit and knit or paint like Grandma Moses  
(Edna loved her).

Maybe because it was expected, I decided No.

"The road less traveled by." Or I'm a crank.

It's all the same, in the end.  
I mean that: it's all the same;  
nothing ever matters.  
Edna would disagree  
and I guess I mean both of them there.

Now when did I give up lying down?  
It was only a couple years ago – fifteen or so.  
I thought about Edna's horses sleeping on their feet  
so that if lions came, they could run without a break.  
That seemed a good model of preparedness.  
Also, I was bored and contrary, so I decided  
to give up something that didn't matter much to me  
but would *épater le bourgeoisie*.  
This plan had miscalculations; I never carried it off,  
I can say now without embarrassment.  
I did learn to take naps on my feet,  
to settle into my hip bones like they're a blanket  
and lean against a doorframe and drift.  
But the lure of the horizontal was too strong for me.  
But the biggest failure was a failure of tactic:  
I forgot how the world works. Here it is, in a nutshell –  
No one asks old ladies how they sleep  
unless they, the old ladies, are in a nut house  
and dribbling. And how could I care about a trick  
pulled off without an audience?  
  
But even though I sleep most nights in a comfortable bed  
I feel like I haven't slept prone in years,  
just because I had the idea.

(*Enter* DEVIL)

THE DEVIL

Old woman, I have brought you a chair.  
It is made from memory and sugar  
and cinnamon sprinkles for pep.  
Sit in it, old woman.  
You've been standing for years that no one remembers,  
and no one remembers you.  
I would tempt you with the ache in your feet  
and the way your back is stretching thin,  
but I am the Devil and there's no point.

The conventional tricks are for television.  
I won't offer you your youth,  
but I have brought you a chair.  
The chair is not a metaphor.  
It will support your weight.  
Sit in it, old woman.  
The one thing you have is time  
and it's a lot easier to spend that time in a chair  
than on your feet talking.  
Now I have a confession to make.  
See, the one thing I have is time,  
and it would be enjoyable passing the time with you  
sitting in chairs across a table playing a sort of whist;  
the stakes would be low (we'd use chocolate chips)  
and the time would pass like it's passing now,  
a feeling I like. The stakes are low now,  
not unimportant (don't be offended!) but low,  
so I can sit in this chair and think and exercise my mouth  
the way I never get a chance to usually,  
because usually the other people are talking.  
Today is my day.  
I could just kick back and relax  
and let the birds fly in the sky  
and think nothing at all about them.  
I feel like a million dollars!  
And you know why? I'll tell you why:  
it's the chair. A chair has echoes:  
it smells like a throne or a dais or the Oval Office.  
You sit in it and other people have to come to you!  
The work is done; Miss Covey! Take dictation!  
It's organic and programmed in your blood.  
If you cock your hips voluntarily, you can't take flight,  
so you must be rich and safe: evolution says so.  
That's it. It's not the power; fuck the throne,  
you sit in this chair and you feel the lions won't eat you.  
I feel it now, though the lions would never eat me  
unless I asked them to, and had a purpose.  
But atavistically I feel it.  
Sit in the chair, old woman,  
and we can talk about things like culture  
and the size of mice comparatively.

I'd say it's waiting, but it's not,  
it's wooden and inert, and it is not a metaphor.  
I will not light it on fire  
or even take your soul if you sit in it  
(assuming there is such a thing, which, at my age,  
takes a massive leap of faith, or stupidity).  
Sit in the chair, old woman,  
I'm waiting and I don't know why.

THE OLD WOMAN

But you're sitting in the chair  
so there is no chair for me.

THE DEVIL

I am a boob. Wait here. (*exits*)

THE OLD WOMAN

If I sit in this chair, and I will,  
it's not because I've been tempted. I can't stress this enough.  
It's a decision born out of temptation  
but completely separate from it.  
Sometimes your old choices get boring.

(*Enter* DEVIL)

THE DEVIL

You're sitting in my chair.

THE OLD WOMAN

Fickle!  
Sit in the chair you brought.

THE DEVIL

All right.

You've stolen my thunder.  
I had another speech prepared, a masterwork of persuasion  
to convert you to the chair I'm sitting in now,  
but when I come back you're sitting already  
and my speech is transmuted unspoken to waste.  
That's the kind of thing that irritates.

THE OLD WOMAN

You blame me for sitting in the chair you sold me on?

THE DEVIL

Of course not! You did what I asked,  
and everyone does.  
But some have better timing.

THE OLD WOMAN

I didn't do what you ask, I did what I wanted.  
You remind me of a game Edna never understood.  
(I mean my sister, if you didn't guess.)  
It went like this: I would say "I'm controlling you."  
She would whimper "No you aren't,"  
and then I'd yell "I made you say that!"  
That was the trump card.  
Nothing beats that.  
And potent it was, since when other kids did it to me,  
even knowing I did it to Edna, there was always this thought  
that made me feel a little sick:  
"What if they really did make me?"  
I assume that was your voice.

THE DEVIL

Don't be stupid. I exist for my own amusement  
and not to put banal voices in other people's heads.  
If you think I'm the Devil, you aren't wrong,  
but if you think you know what that means,  
you are.

THE OLD WOMAN

I have questions to ask you.

THE DEVIL

Don't ask them. Would you like to play whist?

THE OLD WOMAN

Nothing would annoy me more.  
Card games are like death  
and I know this isn't death.  
Hearts amused me once.  
Now it reminds me of things I've hated all my life  
like foursomes and opera.

THE DEVIL

What do you want to do then?  
Something changed when I was out of the room

and now I'm not in charge.

THE OLD WOMAN

I'd like to sit a moment longer and pretend there's a sunset.  
We can watch it together, but not say a thing.  
Then I will stand up and leave through that door  
because of the dentist's appointment I need to keep tomorrow.  
It's not that I don't like you – I do! –  
but I'm too old to get married to anyone,  
and you frighten me too much to sit in the dark with.

THE DEVIL

I used to think fear was power.

THE OLD WOMAN

It is, it is.

THE DEVIL

Thank you, Einstein.  
What I meant was,  
I don't want that kind of power any more.

THE OLD WOMAN

Who would?

*(Spectacular sunset)*

THE OLD WOMAN

Good night. I'll take the chair with me, if that's all right.  
I recently threw out my remembrances  
and it's always good to start again.

THE DEVIL

You can take it if you can stand.

THE OLD WOMAN

It's funny –  
it was always difficult –  
but I don't remember it being this hard –

There!

Thank you for the chair.  
I'll try and remember you,  
but no promises.  
I drug myself a lot these days. *(exits)*

THE DEVIL

Good night, good night.

I'll just sit here and fall asleep;  
that's what I would have done anyway.

The day was long and had its faults.

You get old and cold but the chair keeps you off the ground.

Good night, good night, my chair.

Good night.

*(He snores)*

*(End)*

Eddie Kohler – 15 Jan 1999