

BO Han
From *The Chair Does Not Know*

CHAPTER 1

Time: dusk

Venue: cottage

Characters: Man and Chair 1

Chair no. 1: How long do I need to keep this position?

Man: Very long.

Chair 1: I can't stand it (wants to move.)

Man: Let me help you.

(Man takes out a rope and binds Chair 1 tight to make sure she can't move anymore.)

Chair 1: My feet are deadened. It makes me feel so uncomfortable. The rope has wrecked my circulation. You'll cripple me!

Man: You are just suffering from imaginary fears. I'm the best carpenter.

Chair 1: Carpenter?

Man: I learned my craft in the East. My master can make a wooden bird fly in sky for three days. And he can carve a tree root into a bull or a horse that the peasants can use for work. And do you believe that he even has a wife made of wood!

Chair 1: You've been to the East? I have heard that every man has lots of wives there.

Man: My master is poor. He could only carve a wooden wife for himself. My master gave her eyes and she became alive. She can sing, dance, do laundry, cook and warm my master's feet at night.

Chair 1: Then why you don't carve a wooden wife for yourself?

Man: My master doesn't want to teach me how to carve a wooden wife. He said that I should go back to my hometown, marry a real woman, have lots of children and lead a real life.

Chair 1: My hands are deadened, too. I need to move a little bit. (Shaking.)

Man: You can't move!

Chair 1: Why?

Man: As a chair, you must keep still.

Chair 1: As a chair? Who's a chair?

Man: You, of course.

Chair 1: How come I am a chair?

Man: How come aren't you a chair? It's obvious you are a chair.

Chair 1: Do you have any evidence to prove that I'm a chair?

Man: Evidence? If you are not a chair, how can you make that position?

Chair 1: It's you who begged me to make the position!

Man: It's not "begged". It's "required." As a chair, you must keep this position.

Chair 1: But I'm really not a chair.

Man: Your position proves that you are a chair.

Chair 1: I'm a human being, not a chair.

Man: You are a human being? Wow, good to know. Is there anyone here who ever saw a human being standing in that position?

Chair 1: I am a human being!

Man: Don't make me laugh. You are just a chair I just made.

Chair 1: You made me?

Man: Of course. I'm a craftsman who learned my skill in the East.

Chair 1: If I'm a chair, how come I can speak? How come that I can move? How come that I can think?

Man: That's exactly the unbelievable skill of the East. All chairs made by Eastern people can move and think. Some can even fly in the sky, fly over cities and forests. They actually can do whatever their masters want them to do. Even if I'm not an Easterner, I learned the skill and then made a chair like you.

Chair 1: Ouch! I really can't keep on the position. You should let me move a little bit.

Man: No. You have to keep the position as long as you are a chair. If I loosen you, you will be as free as human beings.

Chair 1: Please! Please! Just a short moment, okay? My arms will fall off.

Man: No.

Chair 1: Please, please. Just five minutes, okay?

Man: Absolutely not.

Chair 1: (Suddenly shouts.) Help! Help!

Man: (runs towards the chair and tries to cover her mouth.) Shut up! Shut up!

Chair 1: (Moves her body violently and keeps shouting.) Hel——p!

Man: Don't be insolent! Are there any other chairs shouting like you? Shut up! I'm ashamed for you.

Chair 1: (Keep shouting.) Help!

(Man and Chair 1 fight violently. Although Chair 1 is being bound, she doesn't want to give up at all.)

Man: Okay, okay. First you stop shouting and then listen to me, okay?

(Chair 1 stops shouting and fighting. She stares at the carpenter. The carpenter moves his hands away from the chair.)

Man: You shouldn't shout. I never treated you badly. I just want you to know how to behave as a chair. I just want you to be an excellent chair. Don't forget, it's me who created you. You have to do whatever I ask you to do.

Chair 1: (Starts shouting again.) Help!

(The carpenter tries to cover her mouth again. They fight.)

Man: (Exhausted, pushes away the chair impatiently.) Very well. I loosen you for a little bit and you shut up from now on.

Chair 1: (Stops shouting.) Half an hour?

Man: No. Five minutes. You just said that.

Chair 1: Help!

Man: 10 minutes!

Chair 1: Help!

Man: Fifteen minutes! If you don't agree, I will take you apart and make you into a wooden floor.

Chair 1: Ok, fifteen minutes then.

Man: (Starts loosening the ropes on her hands.) Now it's eight o'clock.. , I will tie you up again in fifteen minutes.

(Chair 1 moves her hands and loosens the ropes woudn around her legs.)

Man: (Ties to stop her.) You never mentioned the rope on your legs.

Chair 1: My feet are dead.

Man: That's right. That's what a chair should feel.

Chair 1: It's only fifteen minutes. Please let me feel a little bit more comfortable. If you don't agree, I will start shouting again. I will let all neighbors know how badly you treat me. I'd prefer to be a wooden floor instead of a chair. At least I could stretch my body then.

Man: (Hesitates for a moment.) Okay, okay. I will let you stretch for fifteen minutes. I spent time on creating you. Actually, I don't want to take you apart.

(Chair 1 loosens the ropes on her legs quickly and immediately makes a cartwheel. She is jumping, running and doing summersaults around the room, cheerfully.)

Man: Don't do those crazy positions. You are a chair, not a puppet.

Chair 1: Then consider me a puppet, or even your wife. Anyways, it makes me feel much more free than being a chair.

Man: I only know how to make a chair, not a puppet.

Chair 1: Oh, my god. Is your head made of wood, little carpenter? Look, as long as you loosen me, I can jump, run and speak exactly like a puppet. What's the difference between me and a real puppet?

Man: But you don't know how to do laundry and cook. And you can't warm my feet at night.

Chair 1: (Fawning) You can teach me. As long as you set me free, I won't be a boring chair anymore. Instead, I could be your sexy wife.

Man: N——o. Anyways, you are a chair instead of a puppet. Let alone be my wife. You'd better enjoy those fifteen minutes and move your body. Don't try to be up to anything. I will bind you again soon. A chair should be a chair!

Chair 1: (Fawning .) You don't want me?

Man: What the hell are you going to do?

Chair 1: I will warm your feet and do what a wife should do. My dear little carpenter, your loneliness breaks my heart.

Man: No, no, no.

Chair 1: I'm good at it as a puppet, or even as a real woman. Look, my lips are shy as the sunset glow on the window. The upcoming bright moon is not as ripe as my breasts. My thighs are the most mysterious part of this room. Their charm is coming from the core of the dark night.

Man: No, no, no.

Chair 1: I'm actually the wife you always wanted. We will have lots of children. We will have a happy family. That's for real. Come on! (Clings to the carpenter's chest.)

Man: (Gets rid of the entanglement) No, no. It doesn't work. You are just a chair! Wooden chair! Wood!

Chair 1: I don't think so. I'm exactly what you want. (Keeps entangling the carpenter.)

Man: (Can't get rid of the entanglement) You are so a piece of wood. You are the rowan I cut from the forest. Look at the grain of your body.

Chair 1: My wild Satan! Don't waste time. The sunset glow on the window is gone. Even she doesn't want to disturb us. Come on, let me warm your feet.

Man: Well... (Suddenly he notices the watch on his wrist.) No. You are just a chair! Time is up. I need to bind you again.

Chair 1: Oh, no, baby. Don't be so cruel. Come close to me and be quiet.

Man: (Gets the rope and catches Chair 1's arm.) You are just a chair.

Chair 1: I am not.

Man: (Starts binding her.) You are!

Chair 1: (Gets rid of the carpenter and gets angry.) I don't want to be your chair!

Man: Come over here! Since you are a chair, you have to behave as a chair. It's nothing about you wanting or not wanting. Everything will get better. Everyone who sit on you will praise you. You are made of the good rowan. You are beautiful, steady and have the charm from the East...

Chair 1: Go to the hell! I don't want to be a chair. My arms and legs will be broken soon. I just want to be like you—to be a human being—to walk and to talk.

Man: But you are already a chair! Please stick to being a chair. In the East, all naughty chairs are thrown into the fire or stoves to heat up copper and iron. I actually don't want to dismantle you.

Chair 1: Don't threaten me. I don't want to be your chair anymore.

Man: There's nothing bad about being a chair. Come over here and follow what I said. This time I won't bind you so tightly.

Chair 1: No, absolutely not!

Man: (Gets a good idea.) Well. Let's say, I will let you be a chair in the day and a puppet at night. Now it's just getting dark and is not the real night yet. So let me bind you for a short moment.

Chair 1: No!

Man: (Walks towards Chair 1.) Come here. Let's do it. Just a few minutes and you will be my puppet wife.

Chair 1: (Step back.) I just want to be a puppet, not a chair.

Man: You are a good child. Don't put me in front of a dilemma. I created you as a chair. Come here! Just a short moment...

Chair 1: (Hesitates) I...

Man: (Jumps at Chair 1 suddenly and traps her arms. He turns nasty.)

Where else can you go! (Binds Chair's arms and legs quickly.) Come on! Let me bind your angel wings, and then let me bind your beautiful legs. Well, now, that's much better. I said before, and I've repeated it hundreds of times. You are only a chair! Don't always dream that you will become a puppet. A chair is a chair.

Chair 1: You are a swindler! Help! Help!

Man: (Covers her mouth immediately.) Shut up! Keep silent is what a chair should do.

Chair 1: (Struggles desperately.) Help! Hel——p!

Man: (Takes off his clothes and stuffs them into Chair's mouth.) Well, now you can't shout anymore.

You are always trouble. Now I have to go back to work. I have to make a sister for you. Two chairs can be quieter than one. (Exits)

(Chair 1 still struggling.)

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Translated from the Chinese by Jiang Bin