

28 Plays Later – Challenge #26

Choose ten inanimate objects, go through a five-step process that helps you select one.

Write a play about it.

BE SEATED

By

Melissa A. Bartell

In the center of an empty stage, two vintage ice cream parlor chairs, both with scratched paint and legs that aren't quite plumb anymore. Between them is a metal patio table. One chair is black and one is white. The white one has a female voice, the black is male. The table is mute. There's a scrim behind them with the image of a brick wall and flowers – clearly, they're on a patio.

BLACK: Hey, do you come here often?

WHITE: Are you seriously using that line on me? I've known you since you were shiny and new.

BLACK: Well, I'm not shiny and new anymore. Then again, neither are you. What *have* you been up to.

WHITE: You don't want to know.

BLACK: Sure, I do.

WHITE: No, really. You *don't* want to know. It's... it's embarrassing.

BLACK: I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours.

WHITE: Fine. You go first.

BLACK: Well...

WHITE: Come on. Don't get your wires in a twist. You want my confessional, put your money where your support spiral is.

BLACK: Well, like you, I started in the restaurant. When was that? The thirties? The forties? I don't remember much except a lot of red sauce and soldiers.

WHITE: Yeah... soldiers and their girls. It was sweet, all that young love.

BLACK: If you say so. A lot of those boys never came home again, or they came home wrong.

WHITE: True. But a lot of them got married and started families. I ended up with one of the daughters of the restaurant owner. I thought you did, too?

BLACK: Yes. I was put on the landing next to an empty milk bottle – one of those big, black, metal ones. I was never sure if he was meant to be intimidating or reassuring. Mostly, he was boring. Never wanted to chat. Just wanted to sit there and be stoic.

WHITE: I was in the far corner of the dining room, behind the table, right on other side of the oven. Hot in winter, hotter in summer, and more often than not, I was stacked high with magazines and newspapers... until there was a dinner party. Then I got used by some child with kicking feet who marked my legs with their shoes. There were so many children who came through that house.

BLACK: You didn't like the children?

WHITE: I liked them okay while they were there, but after they left – went home or grew up or whatever – the couple in the house was always so sad and lonely. They had so much love.

BLACK: But they weren't isolated. I remember card games, laughter, music... more red sauce – what is it with that family and tomatoes?

WHITE: Well, they're Italian...

BLACK: So? I'm wire and you don't see me devouring filings or hoovering up magnets.

WHITE: And they lived in New Jersey. The woman... she used to say nothing was so luscious as a Jersey tomato.

BLACK: If you say so.

WHITE: She used to... this is the embarrassing part... she used to use me to stretch her undergarments. Something called a 'girdle.' I was certain it would bend me out of shape, but it never did.

BLACK: Well, your upper curves are awfully similar to a human woman's... what was that look for?

WHITE: Glimpsed yourself in a mirror lately? You have the same curves I do.

BLACK: I don't have any memories after that house. It's all blank.

WHITE: I do. I travelled with one of the girdle-woman's daughters. We went to someplace called Colorado and I was partnered with a desk in *her* daughter's bedroom. She used to sit in me and write for hours. I never knew what she was writing, but she was happy, scribbling away with a pencil. Banging away on a typewriter.

BLACK: That doesn't sound so bad.

WHITE: No... that wasn't. Chairs are meant for people to be seated on. You know? But she... sometimes she would move me into the center of the room and climb onto my seat and...

BLACK: And what?

WHITE: I can't... it's mortifying...

BLACK: Oh, come on. I won't judge.

WHITE: Tap dance. She would tap dance. Well... no, that's not accurate. She'd only ever taken ballet lessons, so she would *try* to tap dance.

BLACK: That's adorable.

WHITE: It's pathetic.

BLACK: It's sweet.

WHITE: Eventually, she did learn to tap... but by then she didn't need to use me as her personal stage. I was just a desk chair again.

BLACK: Just... ?

WHITE: Well, sometimes, there were times when I'd be used at the dinner table – if there were a lot of guests.

BLACK: I miss those big dinners.

WHITE: I prefer the quiet these days. Although, it's sometimes a little too quiet.

BLACK: Tell me?

WHITE: I spent a lot of time as a vanity chair. In a bathroom. I only get used a couple of times a week, and the floor I'm on is tiled, and when my feet get caught on the grout, she blames me.

BLACK: Guess that's why we're out here now. Baking in the sun. Freezing in the cold. We're old and boring and out of fashion.

WHITE: Shabby, but not chic.

BLACK: It's the order of things, I guess. Maybe we'll survive to come back into fashion. Maybe we won't. One can only hope.

WHITE: There's another thing to hope about, now we're out on the patio.

BLACK: You have to go there, don't you?

WHITE: It has to be said.

BOTH: I hope it doesn't rain.

BLACKOUT