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Dear Chair

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Nonfiction by Susan Hodara

I never sit on you, but you sit beside me day after day while I work at my desk. I sit on the big black swivel-y chair, whose vinyl surface the cats pockmarked when they were kittens. I roll into and away from the desk as I think. You remain still; the only part of you not tucked beneath the tabletop is your gently rounded back.

You are my witness. You watch as my fingers graze my keyboard, flurrying then pausing. Do you notice that when I stop, my eyes travel upward to gaze out the window in front of me? There is much to see out there. Cars

passing, neighbors jogging, the mail truck gliding up to our mailbox across the street. At night, the glow of flashlights dancing before dogwalkers. Wind, rain, snow. Our Japanese maple, branches bare now but soon to sprout crimson buds and later to obscure my view with its bouquet of fluttering red. Then I start up again – tap tap tap, the sound of unspooling words.

You are wooden, old-fashioned, sturdy. You are painted an unnamable color – part green, part gray, part ochre, flecked in places, scuffed, with three faded red blotches on the edge of your seat. I don't know how they got there. I don't know how you got here. Were you in this room when it was Sofie's bedroom, when I came in here each evening to kiss her goodnight? I do know I chose you to be next to me, out of all the other chairs.

You are the only one who hears my telephone conversations, who watches as I get up and walk over to peer at myself in the mirror behind me. You see me shuffling between emails and articles and online shopping, interrupting myself when I can't maintain a thought. You see me meditating, eyes closed, headphones in my ears. You see me sipping coffee from my red flowered cup in the morning, and then, after lunch, tea from the heavy mug I brought home from some town along the Pacific Coast Highway, swirls of blue and white with a sad chip at the top of the handle. Eating my salad out of a round stainless steel bowl, wiping my fingers on a crumpled white paper napkin so I can type as I chew. The food grounds me, as do the coffee and tea.

Your back is a curve of wood resting on six turned spokes. There is a slot carved out in the center, its inside edges smoothed, big enough to insert a small hand that might want to drag you somewhere or lift you up. But you never move. You wait silently when, sometimes in the late afternoon, I slip under the covers of Sofie's old twin bed, still where it was when she was growing up. If I fall asleep for half an hour, I am pleased that I rested, assured that my brain will be more forthcoming in the aftermath.

You are beside me as I arrange my calendar, pay my bills, make my doctor appointments. Teach my Zoom students. Finish a writing assignment and hit send, then feel the freedom I'll have for a few days before I tackle my next one. And, as I sit beside you, you are present while the deepest, most honest parts of my life unfold.

You are my "extra" chair, ready for a guest who might want to sit with me to keep me company or to look at my computer with me. But guests are rare at this desk; it is my place of treasured solitude. You are squat and unimposing. Welcoming. Pushed into place, nearly hidden. Always there.

Susan Hodara is a journalist, memoirist and educator. Her articles have appeared in *The New York Times* and more. Her short memoirs are published in assorted literary journals. She is co-author of "Still Here Thinking of You" (Big Table Publishing, 2013). She has taught memoir writing for many years. Visit www.susanhodara.com.

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