

THE CHAIR V3

A short play by Nick Miller

CHARACTERS (1 male, 1 female, 1 either):

The Prisoner, male, American
Prison Official, male or female
Prison Visitor, Female, British

*Location: San Quentin State Prison, Marin County.
The only penitentiary set up for condemned male prisoners.
The Prison officer escorts a woman in to talk to the prisoner.
The visitor is not known to the prisoner.*

Officer: This is Mr Mitchell. You want me to wait with you?

Geraldine: *A little nervous but determined to be in control
She gives a slight wave to the officer.*
No. No it's fine.

Officer: Press that device if you need us.

Geraldine: I will. I mean I don't think it will be necessary.
She acknowledges Mitchell with a slight smile
Thank you.

Officer: Don't hesitate if you feel unsafe.

Mitchell: I think I'll be OK.

Officer: Funny guy. Play nice, Mitchell.
Don't make things worse for yourself.

*The officer closes the door behind me as he leaves and Geraldine
walks to the vacant chair next to Mitchell, giving him a slightly wide berth
as she walks past him*

Mitchell: *He chuckles*
Make things worse for myself? I'm condemned to die by
lethal injection. I'm struggling to think...

Geraldine: Hello, Mr Mitchell. Or do you prefer Desmond? I'm...

Mitchell: Mitch.

Geraldine: Sorry?

Mitchell: Call me Mitch. Everyone does. Did.

Geraldine: OK. My name is Geraldine... Somerfield. I've been asked to
visit you. I understand your ...

Mitchell: Geraldine. That's nice. May I call you Geraldine?

Geraldine: Yes of course.

Mitchell: Nice to meet you. Excuse my not getting up.

After a slight pause, she realises the joke and she laughs politely

Mitchell: Pardon me. I think they call it gallows humour where you come from.

Geraldine: How do you know where I come from?

Mitchell: You have an English accent. Your name is of Irish descent. I'd say you have mixed blood.

Geraldine: Very clever.

Mitchell: Not really. You seem nice.

Geraldine: Thank you. I think. So... Mitch.

Mitchell: Yes, Geraldine.

He stares at her, waiting for a response, which makes her feel uncomfortable.

Geraldine: I understand you wanted to see someone to talk about... well, I'm not sure what you want to talk about. But you can speak freely to me.

Mitchell: About anything?

Geraldine: Within reason.

Mitchell: Define reason.

Geraldine: I won't allow threatening behaviour or anything... that might be deemed provocative. Other than that. I'll let you know if it's not OK.

Mitchell: Define provocative.

Geraldine: I'm sure you know.

Mitchell: Don't worry. It's not a hijack. I have no agenda.

Geraldine: *Slightly bemused and mistrusting*
I hope not. I mean I'm sure you haven't.

Geraldine: *She pauses*
So... did you not want to see one of your friends or family?

Mitchell: No family. No friends. Would you be my friend?
He re-phrases and stumbles around his own question
I mean that's not asking you to be my friend.
Not that you wouldn't be a good friend.
I'm sorry, I mean if you WERE my friend would YOU still be my friend after... what I've done.

Geraldine: Don't apologise. I understand the question.
I should apologise. I shouldn't have assumed that you had family.

Mitchell: Oh I have family. They just... don't want to see me.

Geraldine: OK.

Mitchell: I asked to see someone.. who wouldn't judge me.

Geraldine: I'm not here to judge you.

Mitchell: Thank you.
He starts to shift his head around from side to side as if flies are buzzing around his head. His hands are tied to the chair arms so he can't move them.

Geraldine: *She looks concerned as if he may be fitting.*
Are you OK?

Mitchell: It's the damn flies. The flies.

Geraldine: *Confused.*
Flies? There are no flies.

Mitchell: Fucking things. They don't leave me alone.

Geraldine: There are no flies.

Mitchell: They are always there. I'm sure it's the same ones.
They buzz around my ears. They make me crazy.

Geraldine: Really? I can't see them.

Mitchell: They are clever. They know how to get to me.

Geraldine: *Sensing a potential link.*
Really? Do you see them or just hear them?

Mitchell: You think I'm crazy?

Geraldine: No. No. Forgive me. I wasn't suggesting you were...
imagining it. Flies can be very annoying.

Mitchell: Fucking flies. Excuse my language.

Geraldine: Have they always bothered you?

Mitchell: Feels like it.

Geraldine: How do they make you react?

Mitchell: *Shifting his head from side to side again*
They make me very angry sometimes. I get angry with them.

Geraldine: *She ponders her next question carefully*
Have they ever... bothered you when you were...
with any of those girls.

Mitchell: When I was with what girls?

Geraldine: The girls you...

Mitchell: I didn't want to talk about those things.

Geraldine: OK. I'm sorry again. I thought maybe the flies...

Mitchell: No. I mean, maybe, I don't remember.

Geraldine: I just wondered.
Pause
Can I ask you something else?

Mitchell: Go ahead.

Geraldine: Did you ask me here for some kind of redemption?

Mitchell: What does that mean?

Geraldine: Redemption. Er... do you feel remorseful ?
Are you sorry about those girls.

Mitchell: A little.

Geraldine: *Slightly shocked.*
Only a little?

Mitchell: There is something wrong with me.

Geraldine: What do you mean?

Mitchell: I don't feel... sorry.

Geraldine: You're not sorry for what you've done?

Mitchell: It's like your guy from the Royal family who never sweats.

Geraldine: How do you know about that?

Mitchell: When you're in here you watch a lot of TV. Internet.
Supervised. Restricted, of course. There's not much
else to do. I like PBS. I like your British programmes.
I like to teach myself things. Although I sometimes think why
do I bother? What's the point of learning anything else at all?
I mean, what can I learn now that will be any benefit?
It's like packing a suitcase but knowing you'll never go on
vacation.

Geraldine: So how do you mean you never feel sorry?

Mitchell: I don't feel any need for rev... for what you said.

Geraldine: Redemption?

Mitchell: Yes does that mean feeling sorry for what I've done?

Geraldine: No it means, I guess, wanting to seek to be absolved of your
sins. Redeeming yourself. Maybe in the eyes of God.

Mitchell: There is no God.

Geraldine: What makes you so sure?

Mitchell: If there was a God he wouldn't let people like me do the things that people like me do. Have done.

Geraldine: That's almost profound.

Mitchell: Only almost?

Geraldine: If you don't mind me saying, it sounds a bit like you're trying to blame your actions on some physical or mental deficiency. I think you are very aware of what you did. I think maybe you got me here to confess.

Mitchell: I got you here to talk.

Geraldine: Ok. So I would like to learn why you think you did what you did. Does something make you so angry that it makes you hurt people? Is it the flies?

Mitchell: *Coldly.*
Maybe.

Geraldine: Maybe?

Mitchell: Sometimes I do get angry. Or I did. You can't get too much of anything in here. You are safe with me. I feel no desire to attack you or assault you. They give you stuff in here.

Geraldine: Stuff? Oh, to suppress your urges?

Mitchell: Yes they make you take it.

Geraldine: So do you know why you're in here?

Mitchell: Yes of course. I hurt people.

Geraldine: *She pauses.*
Well you... don't just hurt people. You have killed people.

Mitchell: So what?

Geraldine: So what? *Trying to suppress her anger.* So what?

Mitchell: I told you. I don't feel like I understand other people's pain. So I don't feel the need to be sorry for what I've done.

Geraldine: You killed three young ladies. You confessed to it. You said they laughed at you.

Mitchell: I don't remember.

Geraldine: That's what you said. I was reading your case notes. I'm not sure I believe you when you say you don't feel other people's pain. If you don't feel other's pain, why would it bother you if they laughed or showed any emotion?

Mitchell: It doesn't work like that.

Geraldine: So how does it work? So that wasn't what provoked you? Maybe you did it for the attention? That's quite common. Some people do these things in a perverse way of seeking notoriety.

Mitchell: What are you saying?

Geraldine: I'm trying to understand. Killing three women... girls... young girls. THREE girls. You must feel something.

Mitchell: Three is nothing.

Geraldine: *Shocked.*
I beg your pardon?

Mitchell: Three is nothing. Ted Bundy did 28. Jeffrey Darmer 17. Gacy 33.

Geraldine: OK I'd rather not hear a league table. I hope you weren't competing.

Mitchell: No I just read up on these people out of curiosity. As I said - not much else to do around here. One guy, Henry Lee Lucas, was convicted of 11 murders but confessed to 3,000. Nut job.

Geraldine: *She smirks at the comment that another murder was nuts.*
Yes but you were caught. Do you think you may have killed more? If you'd not been caught?

Mitchell: I have no idea. Probably. Maybe.

Geraldine: Six young women. They never did anything to you. So why?

Mitchell: I thought you were here just to talk to me. Not to judge me.

Geraldine: I'm not judging you. I'm trying to understand you.

Mitchell: I don't understand me.

Geraldine: *Pause.*

I feel I should go. I'm not sure I know how I can help you.

She gets up to go but hesitates and sits again. Pause.

When you were arrested you went into great detail about how you harmed these girls. But not why.

Mitchell: I don't know why.

Geraldine: Was it the flies? Did something else make you so angry?

Mitchell: I don't know. I can't tell you anything else.

Geraldine: Ok.

She gets up again and readies herself to leave.

He starts to twitch to avoid 'the flies' again.

Geraldine: Look. I don't think I'm the best person for this.

Unless there's something more you want to tell me?

Anything at all?

He stays silent so eventually, with no response, she gets up to leave and walks to the door. She knocks at the door to be let out.

The warder starts to open it.

As the door opens Mitch speaks.

Mitchell: Jessica is a nice name.

Geraldine stops and turns around in shock

Geraldine: What did you say?

Mitchell: It's a nice name for a girl.

After a long pause

Geraldine: What the fuck are you doing?

Mitchell: I'm not doing anything.

Geraldine: Why did you say that?

After a long pause

Mitchell: Simon is a nice name too. For a boy.

Angry now she wakes the guard away and shuts the door

Geraldine: What the fuck are you playing at?

Mitchell: Nothing. I'm not playing.

Geraldine: Those names...

Mitchell: Your children. They have nice names.

She walks back towards him. More angry now

Geraldine: How do you... Who told you that?

Mitchell: I told you. In here you have have nothing much else to do.

She pauses to think. She speaks more angrily, perhaps pointing finger

Geraldine: No. They wouldn't let you do that. If they give you internet access they'd be watching your every move. No. Someone here must have... Don't you ever say their names again.

Mitchell: It's a free country. Well, not for me, maybe.

She pauses again and looks worried

Geraldine: What else ... what else do you know... You're not planning...

Mitchell: What can I do... from in here?

There is a long pause. She sits down again and composes herself

Geraldine: Look. Let me tell you something.
She pauses again and composes herself.
Her manner changes

I don't do this job because it's fun. It's not fun.
Whatever you think fun is. This isn't it.
I do it because, believe it or not, I want to try and help people.
But there's only so much I can do. If I feel threatened I can't
allow myself to be in that situation because of my children.

I came to see you because I hoped that you might want to
leave this world feeling at least one person wanted to...
...bothered to listen to you.
I hoped I might be the person who was able to make a
difference in what remains of your life.

Was I being naive? Am I being naive in assuming that at the
core of everyone's soul is a decent person trying to get out?

I'm sure you're not that interested but I'm gonna tell you
anyway.

She pauses again

My life is a very simple one. I'm a single parent. My husband
abandoned us some while ago. But fuck him. We get by.
We've got by.

I didn't and I don't need him. I pay my way. I always have.
Trust me, I've got more balls than he has.

They both laugh slightly awkwardly

I never let HIM intimidate me and neither will YOU.

Mitch: I wasn't really meaning to...

Geraldine: Yes you were. Anyway, shut up... I'm lecturing...
They both laugh again slightly

Look. I have an idea. Let's draw a line in this conversation
now. I'll go away. I'll come back in a few days when you've
had time to think about it. Whether you want to at least have
ONE person willing to listen to your bullshit.

She smiles

You can cancel if you want. But hey... what will be YOU giving
up on ME and not ME giving up on YOU. Make sense?

Another pause

Mitch: Thank you
She stands up to leave

Mitch: Sorry. Thank you.

Geraldine: Apology accepted. See you next week.
Now you know. Don't fuck with me.

She winks they both smile. She leaves