

“Guinea Pigs”

It's three quarters of a metre in length, half a metre deep and half a metre high and on its surface is a fucking massive big portrait of a hamster eating a carrot. It's sitting in the corner of my fourteen square meter studio apartment. It has a cloth draped over it and on top of the cloth is three separate stacks of university textbooks: physics 101, 304, 405, 406; chemistry 105, 106, 207; mathematics 203, 244, 245, 299, 399, 499. The leg on the lower right corner is at a queasy angle, 3 centimetres away from snapping off, but the friction of the carpet keeps it still. It sits next to my bed and in the night I stare through the layer of cloth and watch the march of the hamsters painted on the side, hut one two three hut one two three hut

It is the only thing my father gave me before he died. Behind the textbooks I keep the jar of his ashes. 200mL of Doctor Ivan Price, professor, clinical psychologist, father.

My sister, “dear, kind, sensitive Peg,” got a guinea pig. The guinea pig got a fucking 140 square meter apartment. To pay the property tax she gave the guinea pig a joint chequing account. The trimming on the baseboards match the colours on her dollhouse. My brother, “headstrong, practical, sturdy Peter,” got a work-shed. The tools inside fit against the calluses he has had since his five year old hand grasped the rubber handles of the \$39.99 Junior Deluxe Tool Set. The shed is complete with a water wheel that provides power to the saws and lathes and it squeaks like a hamster wheel as it spins and spins and spins --

(Doctor Price, father, lying on his deathbed, hands trembling, delegating, croaking, “But Ginny, my mind-over-matter sweetheart, I know that all you need is --”)

There are holes gouged in the eyes of the desk from thirty years ago when I used to poke it with pencil lead when I didn't want to do math problems. There are scratches along the carrot

from thirty years ago when I didn't want to do math problems. There are squiggly indents along its face from when I did math problems, from when thirty years ago "Ginny, sweetheart, you still have twenty-five pages left, you'll have lunch right when you finish." Glasses perched on head visible behind the stacks and stacks of papers and magazines, *Life*, *Nature*, *Scientific American*, *Scientific American Mind*, *Psychology Today*, open to an article, The Effects of Long Term Cond--

Slam of a hand.

"Don't touch that. Ginny. Sweetheart. Finish your math problems. When you do, then you will get lunch."

What could I have done but finish the problems?

I take off the jar of ashes, the textbooks, the cloth, and put them on my bed in my fourteen square meter studio apartment. I look at the hamster.

It is not a hamster. It is a guinea pig. It looks like exactly like Peg's fucking richer-than-me fucking property-tax-paying guinea pig.

I take a hammer a crowbar I break my EasyClean™ microwave and take out anything sharp I can salvage I throw I hurl I swing crunch smash

I destroy it.

I lay over it the cloth -- a shroud. It is laid to rest. I shuffle to my bed. I lay to rest.

A knock: my mother at the door. Sunday morning, her check-in time. A sunbathing rat recoils, sprints away back to the crack in the baseboard. Lucky.

She's gonna notice the desk she's gonna ask about the desk where is the desk is the desk gone what have you done to it why would I ever call you my child what on earth could have prompted you to do this to the one possession he left to you how dare you how dare you how dare you

Virginia, darling, how's--

It's great I just put it in storage that's just a project I'm working on in the corner it's private

What? You put what in what?

Nothing

Are you okay?

Yup

What happened to your microwave?

The rats

What happened to your hands?

I was holding Peg's pig and it just

Well you have to be careful with these things!

I know mother

That guinea pig is awfully sweet but if you don't handle it right it can get bitey!

I know mother

Margaret did do such a good job with it, she's taught it to jump through hoops now, oh I have a video of it let me show you, such an acrobat.

I know mother I've seen mother

Oh but let me show you.

See? It jumps right through. Impressive what you can teach them. You just hope they like it, don't you?

Yes very impressive I'm sure it does

Darling are you sure you're alright?

Yes mother

Well here's some bananas I picked up for you, some of them are a bit rotten because they were in the sale area but maybe you can freeze them and make muffins when you have some time.

Thank you

You do have flour?

Yes mother

You need flour to make muffins. And baking soda.

I know mother

Yes. Well I best be off.

Alright mother

Goodbye darling, keep safe. Maybe clean up a little.

Thank you mother I will mother

I close the door and she steps out of its way. I hear her going down the hallway. I hear her stop. I hear the elevator sound. I hear the elevator doors roll. I hear her step into the elevator. I hear the elevator doors roll. I hear my heartbeat decelerate at a rate of -0.5833bpm/s .

I go to the shroud, I lift it. It smells of a woodshop. The resin which has been stuck under paint for thirty-four years is released. It is dusty but you can still inhale the residual forest. I lift a piece, thin, long, with guinea pig feet, hut one two three

Virginia?

Uh mom I

Oh darling.

Oh darling I am so proud.

The simplest expression of the chemical reaction of burning wood is $C_6H_{12}O_6 + 6 O_2 = 6 CO_2 + 6 H_2O$. With enough age the smell of burning paint will not overwhelm the wood and the smokiness will be husky, thick, blanketing. From my apartment it took 47 minutes with light traffic to go to the nearest beach; an hour and 14 minutes when accounting for the transport time of wood shards. It takes 12 muscles for a human face to create a genuine smile, 24 for two faces to smile at the same time. Human ashes take up 200 cubic centimetres of space. The ashes of a desk .75 meters long .5 metres deep and .5 meters tall take up 350 cubic centimetres.

On weekdays, it is possible to take a ferry that departs every four and a half hours starting at 7:45am. If two people plan to take one together a week or more in advance they will save \$10.50 by advance booking.

(shouted over 85 decibels of boat engines and wind) Why?

(shouted in reply) He thought he knew everything, darling. I'm sorry. I didn't question it.

(shouted in reply)

(shouted in reply) Darling, I didn't know if you were ready. I should have given this to you sooner. I'm sorry.

Psychology Today thirty years ago open to an article The Effects of Long Term Conditioning on The Child's Mind by Dr. Ivan Price.

It takes less than a second for dust to fall out of an uncapped jar tipped upside down. It takes more than a minute at the height of the second deck of a ferry boat (approximately 10 metres above the surface) for gravity to prevail over wind and for them to fall to the ocean water.

To fill the space in my apartment beside my bed I have bought a hamster. He weighs 25 g and today I fed him two tablespoons of Turbo© brand pellets and there is always hay for lunch. Today I gave him a slice of banana. I let him do what he likes. I named him after my father.