



'Come, climb up on this chair,'
One day, Life said unto me,
'And, while you are up there,
Look around and oversee.'

'It is perhaps way too high,
I regret I'm not so tall,
Gingerly I shall try,
But I fear that I may fall!'

Though it heard my words of doubt,
Life did not in any way falter,
Instead it reached all out,
My Fear into Hope to alter.

With beauty to meet the eye,
And warmth and goodness, too,
The chair that seemed so high
Moved down a notch or two.

Yet there was something strange
In the way the chair would slip
And its height would often change
Sometimes, I'd even trip!

As soon as I would think
That the chair was feeling easy,
Its legs would start to sink
And turn my stomach queasy.

Often, as I got off the chair,
Almost everyone around,
Would put me right back there,
And then question my ground.

'How can you talk to us thus?
'From above, how can you tower?
'We thought you were one of us,
Are you coming down from power?'

'No, no!' I'd hasten to reassure,
'I really mean you well,
But whoever this chair secures,
Will ask: and you must tell!'

'That isn't what we're used to,'
The answer shone through a glare,
'We can only work with you,
If you come down from this chair.'

So scamper down I would,
In all haste and ready cheer,
Then find things weren't so good,
As all order would disappear.

With untiring patience and zeal,
To my chair I would return,
And speak so as to appeal,
But I would try not to be stern.

A frown, a shrug, a glare,
Would make the chair seem higher,
So as soon as I was aware,
I would push aside my ire.

It became an exercise steady,
I was in an eternal gym,
My inner muscles got ready,
My temper: it got slim!

Yet, a slip in word or tone,
At the end of a tiring day,
Would do the work alone,
Of washing all my effort away.

'She's tough and harsh and rude,'
The winds would blithely sing,
'Why must we bear her moods?
Why must she hardness bring?'

'Soft and gentle is our grass,
Hurt not our feelings bare,
If at all this way you pass,
Speak only when you care.

'We will not give unto you,
What you ask from your chair,
For we have feelings, too,
Of which you'd better beware!

'Our feelings to you must matter,
Show us tender, loving care,
Then perhaps we will gather,
Guardedly around your chair.

'But should you hurt us once,
With your look or word or tone,
We will upon you pounce,
By leaving you well alone.

'You will not hear our laughter,
You may not see our smile,
We hope that therein after,
You will watch and wait awhile.'

So I'd watch and take my place,
In the hope that therein after,
By slowing down my pace,
There would be peace and laughter.

But then the chair would call,
For me to oversee,
If two persons could work at all,
In peaceful harmony.

To set their swords aside,
And help them meet each other,
Upon the chair, astride,
I'd sit and be their mother.

So you see, I was off and on,
This chair that stood so high,
And now I am so far gone,
As to leave it high and dry.

Not a single one knows
How hard I tried to fit,
Yet my patience, as it grows,
Says it matters not a bit.

For, as Life is always wise,
What does a high chair hold?
With ardour, I have tried,
Now let the truth be told.

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Neeraja Raghavan is a consultant with Academics and Pedagogy team of Azim Premji University Resource Center, Bangalore. She composed this poem when she decided to end a two-year stint at being Vice Principal and then Principal of a residential school. Since she found that administration work was not quite her cup of tea, she switched to being an educational consultant and free lance writer, which is what she continues to do now, based in Bangalore. She can be reached at neeraja@azimpremjifoundation.org.

