

RECOVERING: IN VELVET

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What does it feel like to recover? To know the worth of your good solid bones, and feel the shame, the neglect, or the misunderstanding of someone who casts you aside instead of seeing your gorgeous potential? Is it a matter of tightening some springs? Or adding new fabric? Or a bit of foam?

It is not your fault for being mistreated by cat claws and sticky little fingers of days long passed. Nor is it your fault for the clashing patterns stretched over your curves. It is not your fault for being cast out to the curb. While you remain dry (and maybe a little sun-faded), may you be discovered, resuscitated, and recovered into glory—before all hope is dashed away by a gentle rain.

Perhaps you, dear chair, once pricked with resentment as your skin was scratched and stained. Or, as sharp claws pilled your intricate threads, you ached with a knowing that you had become undesirable. Now a project: waiting, forgotten in a dark basement, cold garage, or musty storage facility. How does it feel now to be hidden away? Suffocating in shrink wrap with your body pressed up against your kin, forced into an obscene tableau for eternity? To be shut away, with no one to appreciate your satin and spring, your strength and softness?

My adult life has been an adventure in secondhand, free, thrifted, side-of-the-road seating. The first time I dared reupholster something was only a few years ago. The golden chair's smooth satin cooled my fingertips, and its back was comfortably elegant—despite the gash, which happened to be front and centre. No amount of glorious tufting could keep my gaze from the foamy insides spewing out. Fading, wear, and an exhausted seat were overlooked for quite some time, until I found a beautiful (and cheap) piece of dark cerulean upholstery velvet.

The process with, let's call them *Blue*, was like a good date: we flirted, we danced, we played dress up, and then Blue let me take her apart, seam by seam, button by button, staple by staple. Caught in a whirlwind of pattern copying, cutting, sewing, stabilizing, removing and adding hundreds of staples, I hardly noticed the blisters bubbling up on my tender fingers—until coming up for air several hours later. It had been a long time since a fling like that. This was a pivotal moment, a creative rebound. It felt so good to lend my spirit to the beauty and practicality of honouring *Blue's* sturdy heap of bones.



Blue, in all their glory.

After testing the waters with *Blue*, I wanted to try again: bigger, more comfortable, and matching. I found two antique solid wood chairs. Their design was a little more challenging, nothing I couldn't handle though, right? I *bought* them. Then I *bought* golden velvet. Together, we unravelled. Entering the realm of curiosity and awe, the undressing began. Our bodies sat in curious ways so that I might gently pry and pull out staples, one by one, each dropping like metallic rain.

Daylighting their yellowed, dusty flesh, I watched caked-in dirt, dust and lost remnants tumble out onto the glittering puddle below. Trying to remember how the tension of the fabric felt; trying to hold the vision of the order of undress. Trying to remember, so that once reduced to its bare essence, I could have a recovery map in mind. As I worked, I felt these little pricks and pulls within me, like the chair was taking me apart, too. Feeling layers come loose, shedding them, and sighing with relief, we let go together.

I removed everything stretched over their beautiful naked bones: the button tacks, the foam, the fluff, the springs, the straps, and the burlap bottom. I witnessed their scars and imperfections. Tiny holes surrounded hammered-in staple fragments that broke off far too deep to be pulled out. Ready, so ready, for another chance, for another lease on life. Shortly thereafter, I froze. I had leaped into this new relationship, we U-Hauled, and I was now face-to-face with my attachment wounds.

The final step, the hardest part, is recovering. What gets to be re-used and reconfigured? What goes in the trash? What to use instead? How? Should we follow the path followed before, aiming for perfection and mimicry? Or will we enter this stage with some play?

What does the chair want to be like? Perfect and forever unfinished? Cozy yet sturdy, obviously touched by an amateur upholsterer? Filled with the tenderness of a vulnerable, relational unravelling?

Two years after hauling these chairs around, I still want to be ready for them. They are waiting, gnawing at my heartstrings, sitting in my living room; golden flesh scarcely covering their exposed guts. I haven't given up. . .they just don't know it. I can see their future: warm velvet sweeping around freshly stuffed seats; little covered buttons creating cushy dimpled backs. Full of new life, they are ready to hold new bodies, dreams, visions, tears, droplets of tea, bits, bobs, and little treasures hidden by little hands.

Today, I gave my couch away to a friend. Today, I have nothing comfortable left to sit on. Today is the day to start again. Perhaps I can even hold the expectation that whatever I do will be *good enough*, that perfect is allowed to float away to the recesses of someone *else's* mind. Perhaps tomorrow, I will start.



Not yet named, not yet finished. One of two.