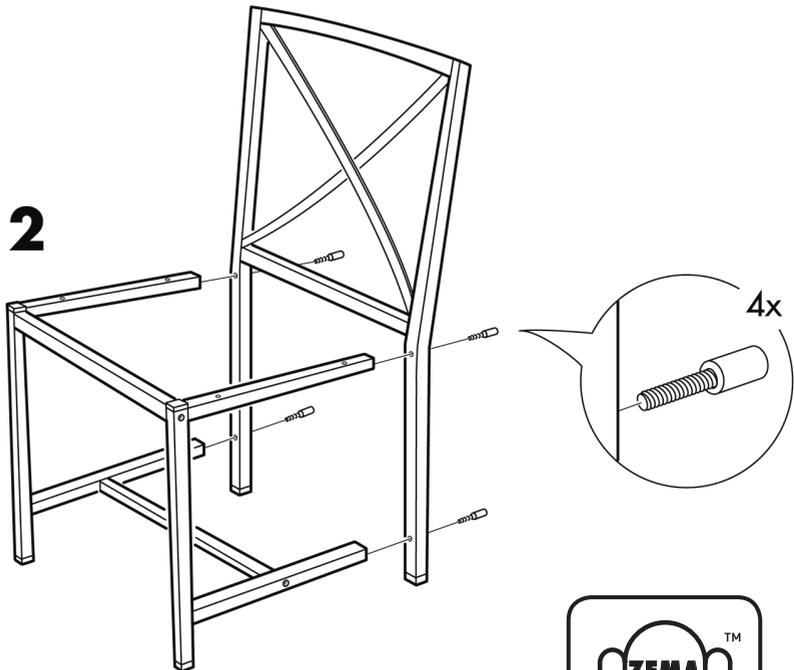
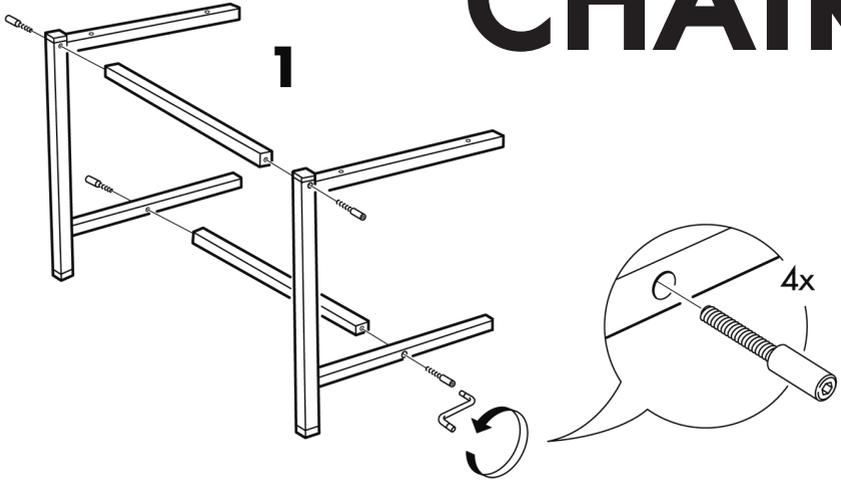


# THE DREAM CHAIR



## 2. Ri • dic • u • lous

Morgan Sweet is a dreamer. He dreams a lot:

Great arcs of molten silver flotsam rise up high into a burnt-edged sky. They are sucked up as though by a giant lollipop coloured straw, and then, just as quickly are spat back out into the salty mass of the ocean far, far below. Billions of shining crystals jump and leap in the wake. Waves spill and crash urging the ocean forward. And through it's highest peak the wooden 'v' of a galleon's hull breaks free, thrown up and, then as suddenly, down in and amongst the waves. For a moment it is lost from view as it is dragged into the depths of the watery valley, but then it is thrown back up out and high above it all. And there upon the deck is a figure, his legs stiff and apart, his arms by his side and his chin tilted up towards the burning orange circle in the sky. It is Morgan as he has never seen himself before: The proud figure of someone twice his height. From the poop he steadies the large oak wheel as it wrestles to be free from his grip. He stares out at the sea before him; he is the one in control.

At once the sea becomes a mass of writhing bodies; their heads turned to stare at him, the mouths open in anger, screams aborted in the depths of their gasping throats. Morgan sees them but looks beyond them, far away from the stretching hands and clawing fingers that reach up to scratch at the ship's side. The smooth salt-washed wood is too smooth to grip. Not a nail or a splinter juts out to offer a grip and the hands slip from the surface and send their bodies falling back down into the sea and out of sight. Morgan ignores the gurgling, distorted screams and drives his chariot forward, its force unrelenting. Seagulls laugh. Fish leap. Evolution has been kind to them. And then the bow begins to lift and all at once the hull is rising out of the water and even further away from the twisting bodies. The cries from below are the agonised, tortuous sounds of animals seeing their last hope dragged away from them. They twist and turn crashing and bouncing against each other like the droplets of water that now consume and rush over them. From high in the sky Morgan and the seagulls see human and water become one, an uncontrollable mass heaving ever on towards a non-existent shore. And the galleon rises higher and higher and higher.

Morgan lifts his head from his folded arm, the imprint of wool across his forehead.

He rubs his scalp. Marianne is beside him, a hand roughly spinning his shoulder.

'We're late,' a distant voice reverbs amongst the dozens of miniscule bones that make up his inner ear. They vibrate and Morgan's brain attempts to grasp the signals with every fibre of its nerve endings. His face is blank. Marianne fidgets.

'We are?' Are we? His body aches.

'Ridiculous.' His wife shakes a bob of dyed blonde hair and is gone. Should he have commented on her new style? It made her look older.

He pulls himself up in his seat and stares at the open notebook before him. Ridiculous? Yes, possibly. Probably. Topless bottles and broken vials, row upon row of tiny packets of carefully labelled powders. Some green, some blue, some a colour you could never describe. June 3rd 1783 the Montgolfiers' balloon = ridiculous. June 4th 1783 the Montgolfiers' balloon = not ridiculous. He's close. He's ( ) that close. He feels the pull – the inextricable lure to the summit. Where the top is he's unsure, he only knows that he feels so close. There's no logic in his emotions, just instinct. His wife doesn't share his ethereal sense of wonder. It's an optional download of the lottery gene pool. Marianne thinks in two dimensions – today and tomorrow. What about the past? What about the future? She's not the dreamer Morgan is. She accepts the world for what it is and her place in it: Hers, Morgan's, and the mini-Sweets she wants to reproduce. That's her only instinct – three hundred million of years of evolution through coitus. And for what? Morgan wants to give the world more than just another poor self-replica. He wants to discover the route to every human's desire; to realise it; unleash it.

These are not experiments you can perform openly in large official laboratories with tinted glass doors and men in white coats and name badges, of course. Genetic mind manipulation is a secretive trade best saved for Eastern European former Nazi bunkers, mysterious radar-free desert labs and small single garages on the outskirts of Wealdstone. People are sensitive about their brains. So Morgan has to make do with stealing moments here and there – in the empty, soulless hours occupied by insomniacs and madmen. And in the dead, blank real world that occupies the in-between his mind is alive with possibilities, options and solutions. His day job consumes the unquestioning lobe of his brain. He looks down at a row of urine filled test-tubes, his pipette hovering above the rim and wonders how a master's degree in chemistry has left him testing the weak piss of elderly worn out kidneys and drunk drivers.

Morgan has a dream. Morgan has lots of dreams:

To create an aspirin for all the world's ills, a chemical that can control the memory of the deepest sleep. One dictated by the sleeper, not dictated by the dream. Suddenly all somnambulant memories are instant and recallable, not fractured and lost the moment they are experienced. How hard can it be? The human brain, after all, is nothing but a pathetic ball of water and muscle held together by fragile cells and charged by neurological pulses manipulated every day by fleeting chemical reactions – emotions of anger and lust, joy and sorrow. Surely stimulating the dreams of the subconscious is nothing more than a matter of balance, like the ingredients of a Victoria sponge.

Impossible? Don't laugh. In Morgan's defence I ask you to consider substitute pig's hearts, face transplants and skin grafts from buttock to face. Cynicism, unfortunately, like reality, is everywhere eating away like acid. But Morgan doesn't need your approval, or mine come to that. He is single minded in his vision, with no one but the ghost of his old college professor hissing support in his ear. Dr Julius Sly was a sad, foolish old man with no more understanding of the world than a twelve year old, but with the inquisitive, unfettered brain of a genius. He was universally despised – as witnessed by the pitiful attendance at his funeral. Only Morgan had a tear in his eye as his shrivelled gin-pickled carcass was lowered into the ground. Julius Sly believed in Morgan, an unremarkable student with average grades, uninspired papers and a grey, almost transparent, charisma. But Professor Sly saw some thing: The passion to discover the undiscovered and the desire to question the unquestioned.

'We are not just scientists Morgan, we are artists,' he would say through rasping, desperate coughs that smelt of rotting yeast. 'We are creators.' So it was, for hours at a time, Morgan would quiz the tired old man's dulling brain. Sucking from him the last desperate equations of thought – trails of creative instinct that Julius had long forgotten existed within him. Inventiveness he had assumed had been lost forever behind the heavy blanket of experience and the damning crush of the day-to-day. The Professor would openly mock the naïve optimism of his student, but, in the darkest moments of the night, envy his desire to refresh the world. To consol himself he would lift his glass and bid his own poor health.

Morgan Sweet stares at the useless block shell of his garage. The wind rattles the thin metal door. It is cold and he shivers. How could this possibly be the birthplace of the most important discovery of the century? Although if a shitty stable was good enough for the son of God... The parallel is full of mocking. Morgan smiles; Julius would be

proud of the analogy. In the cinema of his memory Morgan lets the projector focus on the Professor: The two of them are stood at the side of the University rugby pitch, hands in pockets, their silhouettes mirroring each other like father and son. A conversion splinters one of the uprights to the burst of spontaneous applause. Does Julius Sly think his idea is foolish?

'Well,' the Professor hesitates. Will he crash and burn or soar and fly? 'In theory.' Another pause as the old man rummages for something in his pocket. 'If the pulses could be controlled through the cytoplasm and ultimately allowed to manipulate the nucleus' control of the balance of the brain's chemicals, then... well, then...' There is an excitement in how Julius knots his fingers together that is not reflected by his agonised expression. 'You know, in a way that isn't harmful - or addictive, just, you know,' he nods to himself, ' then...' He doesn't finish the sentence, there's no need. And with the possibility of that moment, the blinding flash of hope through this one man's gnarled cynicism, Morgan has kept his dream alive.

In the hallway Marianne is ready. She is holding Morgan's coat out for him and as he takes it she smooths down the hair on his nape, cooing after him like the mother she's anxious to be.

'It's Dr Ahmed this evening. She sounded lovely on the phone.' She stops and looks at her husband. 'You okay?' He nods. 'You will say something this time, won't you? Not just leave me to do the talking. We both want this don't we.' A statement, not a question.

'Of course,' Morgan answers. But Morgan doesn't want to talk about ovulation induction agents, LH surges and intracytoplasmic sperm injections with someone whose first name he doesn't even know. Anyway, Morgan's baby has already been conceived – it's in the garage waiting to be born. Now it just needs to gestate and grow. It's so close. Morgan has a barely controllable urge to place his hand on the imaginary belly, lower his ear and listen to his unborn child breathing. Maybe he should leave Radio Three on to comfort his child whilst he is gone. He shakes the thought from his mind.

The young girl beside him on the rugby pitch threads her arms through his from behind, she rests her chin on his shoulder and it feels like a blanket thrown over him in the cold of night. The crowd scream and she jumps back throwing her hands together above her head and jumping up and down. Her excitement is infectious. Julius Sly is looking at the boy amused. Is it a smile trimmed by a frown or a frown tempered by a

smile? Marianne tugs at his arm.

'Let's go back to the dorm,' she whispers, her breath cooling his ear and bringing the hairs on his neck alive. Let the young learn by their own mistakes, Julius thinks, I had to. Marianne is the most beautiful girl on the campus. The most beautiful girl Morgan has ever seen. She has twisting golden hair that tumbles down between her smooth, angular shoulder blades. Julius Sly stares at her. Momentarily he's lost in the labyrinth of his own past. Love. Lust. Call it what you will, the old man knows it is there to steal away the ambition of questioning youth, as though sent out by nature to steady a rocking boat and stabilise the equilibrium. There is nothing to question here young friends. Fall in love – get married – have children – then you will understand the world. Hush now, go to sleep. The ball flies out to the wing and the pack chase, falling in a crumbled mass at the young couple's feet. Marianne falls back into Morgan's arms. He holds her tight. He loves the way she feels when he holds her. He wants to hold her like this forever.

Marianne has just said something of earth shattering importance bringing him back to the now and the small brown hallway of his life.

'You're not listening to me, are you Morgan?'

'Yes, I am.' No, he isn't.

'We'll be late for our appointment.' She urges. He doesn't want to be here, in the now, the today, the real. He wants to be somewhere infinitely more relevant. He wants to be in the world of discovery. He wants to be in his garage - surrounded by the paraphernalia of possibility.

