

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO FEEL HUNGRY

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### CHARACTERS

Maury	An overweight man in his 50s
Tina	His wife, a smallish woman in her 50s

### SETTING

Their living room

### TIME

Around 2:00 a.m.

... indicates dialogue that trails off.

— indicates dialogue that is cut off.

// indicates overlapping dialogue.

Dialogue in parentheses is not spoken, but indicates an expression or gesture.

*Dim light rises on a living room. MAURY, a big man in sweats, sits on the couch, his eyes glinting like a raccoon's.*

MAURY

Tina? *(silence)* Tina, honey? *(dead silence)* TINA!

*There's rustling down the hall. Then footsteps. TINA appears in her pajamas. She listens.*

TINA

*(softly)*

Maury? You awake?

MAURY

Yeah.

TINA

Can't you sleep?

MAURY

No.

TINA

Try to sleep, okay?

MAURY

I'm done.

TINA

What do you mean?

MAURY

I'm done. I don't want to do this anymore.

*She turns on a lamp, casting a buttery glow on the room. We might notice that MAURY'S right wrist is chained to the midsection of the couch.*

TINA

It's only two o'clock.

MAURY

Yeah?

TINA

You're done? You want to give up?

MAURY

I don't want to give up. I'm not the kind of person who gives up.

TINA

But you don't want to do it anymore?

MAURY

I think I've learned what I wanted to learn.

TINA

We had ice cream at 10:30. It's only been three and a half hours.

*He holds his right hand out to her. A padlock dangles from the chain.*

MAURY

I'm done. Unlock me.

TINA

Don't you want to talk about it?

MAURY

It's late. Just unlock me.

TINA

I think we should talk about it.

MAURY

*(standing, approaching her with his hand out)*

Unlock me, Tina.

TINA

You told me not to—

MAURY

Unlock me!

*Taking one more forceful step toward her, his wrist snaps back to the couch.*

TINA

Maury!

MAURY

Ow! Ow! Goddamnit! Fuck!

*She goes to him.*

TINA

Maury, are you—?

MAURY

*(pushing her away)*

Goddamnit! My wrist! I think I broke my wrist!

TINA

You want to go to emergency?

MAURY

Just unchain me so we can look at it!

TINA

No, honey, we need to talk first. *(he glares at her)* You said not to unlock you. You said you'd tell me to unlock you but not to pay any attention to you. You said you'd pretend you were sick or hurt or—

MAURY

I'm not pretending! I seriously hurt my wrist.

TINA

You said not to let you loose until you were hungry.

MAURY

Look at my wrist. There's blood on it.

TINA

That's not blood. That's redness.

MAURY

It could be // broken—

TINA

It would be blue and purple if it was broken. You wouldn't be able to talk if—

MAURY

Tina—!

TINA

Are you going to talk about this or not?!

MAURY

I don't want to feel hungry! I *am* hungry! I'm as hungry as I want to be. I don't want to get any hungrier.

TINA

What about the refugees? You said those poor people in the camps. No food, no snacks. Dirt, you said. All they have to eat is dirt. And here you are this big American slob!

MAURY

What?!

TINA

That's what *you* said! I don't say that. You said you'd never felt hungry in your whole life. That you don't let yourself get hungry. Couldn't!

MAURY

Okay, can we calm down? Can we do that?

TINA

Fine. Yes. Let's calm down and talk about this rationally.

MAURY

Fine.

*He paces. He sits, breathes. She sits on the arm of the couch.*

MAURY (cont'd)

I know what I said. I know what I said and I meant it. And I've thought about it some more and I don't think I actually have to starve to death to know what it's like to feel hungry or to have empathy for people who don't have enough food in the world.

TINA

Seven hundred ninety-five million you said, and you're not // starving to—

MAURY

I know what I said! (*off her look*) Okay. Sorry. The point is, what I've realized is, I already have empathy. I already feel guilty. I don't need to do this little experiment to teach myself a lesson.

TINA

No the point is that you don't know what it feels like to feel hungry. Or you do and you don't like it.

MAURY  
I *don't* like it.

TINA  
You fear it.

MAURY  
I don't fear it.

TINA  
Yes you do.

MAURY  
I don't fear hunger. I just like to eat. I like to eat and I happen to live in a country where food is readily available and I can get the // food I like any time—

TINA  
Let's be honest, Maury. You have issues.

MAURY  
Oh, and you don't?

TINA  
We're not talking about my issues. We can talk about my issues if you want. Anytime. I'm happy to talk about my issues. But you never seem interested in my issues. What we're talking about now is your issues. One issue in particular.

MAURY  
Which is what, Dr. Freud?

TINA  
Do you want me to say it?

MAURY  
If you're so smart.

TINA  
You're afraid you'll feel something if you feel hungry.

MAURY  
Right. I'll feel hungry.

TINA  
No, you'll feel something else.

MAURY

Like what!

TINA

I don't know. Do you want me to guess? Like inadequate. Like you're a failure or that you've lost your chance to do what you wanted to in life. Or that you're angry at me, or your father, or your boss for controlling you. Or guilty for getting that guy fired at your last job. Or overwhelming shame about your childhood—

MAURY

Or all of the above, huh? You must think I'm a real nut job. A real loser.

TINA

I don't think you're a loser or that you failed, Maury. I'm just trying to name the things you think about yourself that you don't want to feel. It's what *you* think!

*He leaps off the couch in a fury. She jumps away. He yanks the chain with both hands and jerks the couch half way across the room.*

MAURY

Get the fucking key and take this fucking chain off of me! Let me go! I'm done! I don't want to do this anymore! Get the key, Tina! Get the key!

TINA

You said not to unchain you under any circumstances!

MAURY

And what I'm saying now is, I'm saying get the key! I'm done with this! I don't want to feel hungry! Do you hear me? Do you? GET THE KEY!

*She takes the key out of her pajama pocket.*

TINA

Key's right here. And guess what? You're not getting it.

*She pockets it.*

MAURY

Goddamnit!

*He drags the couch farther. She jumps on top, but he keeps dragging. She gets off and tugs it the opposite direction.*



MAURY

Let go Tina!  
I'll get it in there!

TINA

You won't get it into the kitchen!  
It's too big!

TINA

Even if you get to the kitchen door, you won't be able to reach the fridge or the cupboards! The chain is too short!

*He stops tugging. They stand panting.*

MAURY

Why are you doing this to me?

TINA

I'm not doing anything to you. You said under no circumstances!

*MAURY thinks, then starts ripping the cushions off the couch and probing its crevices.*

TINA (cont'd)

What are you doing?

MAURY

Searching for something to eat!

TINA

Oh, gross! You don't know what's down there. Toenails and crap!

MAURY

You don't seem to understand how desperate I am here!

*(he picks through coins and lint and seizes on a small morsel)*

Aha!

TINA

What? What is that?

MAURY

Raisin.

TINA

Rais ... ?! No it isn't. That's a mouse dropping, Maury!

MAURY

No, it's clearly a raisin. And I'm going to eat it.

No, don't!  
TINA

*He pops the morsel in his mouth. A beat and then he spits it out again with force, coughing and gagging.*

Mouse dropping!  
MAURY

I told you!  
TINA

Coke! Get me a Coke, quick!  
MAURY

*She rushes off to the kitchen and returns immediately with a bottle of water. He stops gagging.*

What's this?  
MAURY (cont'd)

Water.  
TINA

I ordered a Coke.  
MAURY

Coke has calories. You said no caloric intake.  
TINA

I never said no caloric intake. A can of Coke is not going to keep me from getting hungry!  
MAURY

Sorry, it's water or nothing.  
TINA

Okay. Sure. All right.  
MAURY

*He reaches for the water, but grabs her instead. He tries to wrestle the key away. She breaks free, takes the key from her pocket, and pops it in her mouth.*

No!!!!  
MAURY (cont'd)

*She swallows it and gloats.*

MAURY (cont'd)

Did you just ...? You just swallowed the key?

TINA

Mm-hmm.

MAURY

Open your mouth. (*she does*) Tongue. (*she lifts it*) You swallowed the fucking key?

TINA

I swallowed the key.

MAURY

How ... how are you going to unchain me? Is there another one?

TINA

Nope. You'll just have to wait.

MAURY

Wait for ...? Ew! How long will that take?

TINA

I don't know. Twelve hours?

MAURY

Holy crap.

TINA

So I guess you're going to find out what it feels like to feel hungry.

MAURY

I guess so. Unless you bring me // something to—

TINA

Mm, not likely. No.

*MAURY goes limp with defeat.*

TINA (cont'd)

Maury, don't be afraid. I feel hungry all the time.

MAURY

You do? (yes) What does it ...

TINA

It's okay, really. I guess I ... feel more alive when I'm hungry. Like I'm ... I don't know ... an animal, and feeling hungry keeps me alive.

MAURY

(sadly)

Alive.

*She guides him to the couch. They sit together.*

TINA

Don't worry, hon, I'll stay here with you. We'll do this together. (they sit a while) You'll be a better person for this. I guarantee it. You'll know what those seven hundred ninety-five million people experience every day.

MAURY

And the others like you?

TINA

And the billion others like me, who let themselves get hungry by choice and feel those feelings. You'll feel them too, Maury. And we'll talk.

*They sit and wait. We hear a tiny growl, like the fierce snarl of a mid-sized rodent.*

MAURY

What's that?

*We hear it again. She leans toward his stomach and listens.*

TINA

Your stomach is growling.

MAURY

Oh, god. It's happening.

TINA

So cute!

*There's a second, smaller growl. Their stomachs growl in harmony. She pats his thigh. Lights fade.*

*End of play.*