The Rock and Pedestal

Escape from an Ill Mind

By

SIMPLY SOBER
ROOMS

Jinx skipped backwards as the gnarled boulder crashed to the ground and took its roll to crush his dirt-stained legs like it had countless times before. Side-stepping the oddly shaped stone, he outstretched his hand and grasped for balance on the narrow pedestal from which it had descended.

Despair covered his face as he scanned his barren room with windowless walls that resembled more of a prison cell than that of a home. Upon them hung tapestries of his thoughts; ever changing murals of future woes and sullen carvings of past scenarios.

Everyone in the vast, living complex has their own rooms, with their own boulder, and a pedestal to balance it on. Years ago, Jinx enjoyed visiting the rooms of others to share in their endeavors and experiences. His pillar was much wider back then, and his rock small and smooth; everyone’s rock is much smaller when they are young. He remembered the rooms other people lived in had color, laughter, and vibrant company coming and going. His room was that way too, long ago, although the memory was difficult for him to capture.

Not every person’s room was inviting and light. Some were sadistic and tempting. Jinx had become enticed to visit these debauched spaces far longer than he should have, leaving his own rock and pillar unattended. The rock grew, rudely and uneven, wobbling as weeks and months passed, until one day it fell from the pedestal which had become widdled slim from neglect. That was when Jinx evaporated from the den he was visiting at the time and rematerialized back in his own room; arrested within a space
he no longer recognized, stuck inside, until he could balance the boulder on top of his pedestal once again.

He noticed the sole light bulb above his head begin to flicker, a foreshadow of the impossible task of balancing his boulder in blackness.

With his head slumped and shoulders round, Jinx dragged his bare and calloused feet towards one of three excessively locked doors, the only exits from his dismal dwelling.

Nervous and embarrassed, he slid the security chains and clacked the deadbolts open, his eyes catching notice of one of the last few chips of gray paint falling off the trim. The sound of creaking hinges was quickly drowned by the echoes of people effortlessly going about their lives down the endless hallway in front of him. But Jinx was incapable of joining, he couldn’t leave.

He slammed the door and trudged back to his rock, teased by the sounds of freedom in the background. Jinx decided to use his anger and vexation as fuel and motivation to push and lift the weight back onto the pedestal so he could finally exit his desolate box once again and join the others outside.

He gripped a grainy pit on the top side of the rock and pulled it away from the wall. Positioning himself between, he posted and pushed the beast into a full roll and propped it to the narrow stand; the pedestal giving just a little more movement than before, another obstacle to make the feat more challenging than it already was.

The method was routine. Find a handhold near the bottom, strain his lower back until the rock was high enough for him to scoot beneath, let the rough surface scratch at his chest and face, heave it past the threshold of the pedestal ledge, then quickly adjust it with both hands and command it to settle.

Holding the uneven weight with his shoulder, his eyes searched the gravel floor for a pebble to wedge between the rock’s contours and its perch. Bruised fingertips retrieved the crude tool from between his toes and jammed it into place.

Willing his boulder to stay, Jinx slowly reversed, hands at the ready and legs loaded to spring forward and catch it if it decided to
fall on its own accord. An untrusting smirk creased his cheek as Jinx turned and strode for the doorway, only half sure his puzzle would hold.

The smell of lilacs and bacon from the outside rooms seeped through the rickety threshold of the doorway to tickle his nose. As his hand reached for the knob the impacting boom from behind sent a jolt up his spine, followed by a solitary tear down his reddening face. He turned and attacked, stomping, and gnashing the boulder with his fists.

After he had nothing left, Jinx let out a dreadful cry and fell forward. The exertion left him sprawled over his rounded nemesis with his cheek smushed and eyes staring blankly at his pitied memories reeling like movies on the stained wall in front of him.

Observances of himself crashing a car, stealing money from his mother’s purse, punching a friend in the face, telling lies to the girl he wanted to sleep with, and other thoughts he fought to push away expanded across the boundaries of the room, haunting him into shivers.

His torment paused when he heard a voice coming from the doorway he’d left open.

“Hello. Can I come in?” said the soft, crackled voice.

“Why would you want to come in here?” Jinx snarled, still motionless except for his rib cage billowing over the rock.

“Heard ya yellin’ and givin’ that rock the business. Looks like you could use some help. Do you mind?”

Jinx lifted his head and cranked his neck to see a breathy and thin old man standing in the doorway holding a walking stick.

“I don’t know how you can help, old man. But sure, come on in.”

The old timer shuffled his feet at a turtle’s pace, jabbing his walking stick at the floor like he was hunting fish in a stream. Jinx watched and wondered how this broken elder could possibly help him with anything.

“What’s your name young man?” the old timer asked.

“Jinx. What’s yours?” Jinx replied.

“Ah yes, of course, Jinx. Good to meet you Jinx. My name is
Robert,” the old man said, straightening his back and puffing his chest the best he could. “Alright Jinx, get off your ass and let’s get that rock back up there.”

Jinx gaffed at the command but did as he was told. Undraping himself from the cold stone, he assumed the squat position and began to pump the weight while the old man cheered him on.

“Come on boy! You’re stronger than that! Get it up there,” said the old man as he poked his walking stick at the boulder when it wanted to lean too far in his direction.

With a gasp, Jinx worked the rock past the lip and onto the top of the pedestal, then held it firm to make up for a gap that was forcing it to lean hard to one side. “It’s just going to fall again,” Jinx prophesied.

“It doesn’t have to,” the old man said while gearing towards the heavy side of the boulder, scooching his feet, and pulling his brown slacks high enough to give himself a wedgie. Strategically inspecting the moon-like craters, the old man positioned one end of his walking stick against it, and the other end in the crux of the wall and floor. “There,” the old man said. His job was done. He gave Jinx a salute and started his journey out of the room with grumbling breathes.

“Hey! Where are you going?” Jinxed asked.

“To bed. I’m old Jinx.”

“What about your stick?”

“Oh, I got about a hundred of those. You keep it,” the old man dismissed with a wave.

“Well, what if it shifts and falls again?” Jinx asked, concerned the fix was temporary like his pebble supports.

“Just keep your doors open kid,” the old man said, his arthritic hand fumbling the rotted door trim as he turned the corner.

Jinx decided he would not leave his room that night, convinced he wouldn’t get far before the rock fell again and he would be beamed back to his prison. Fearful the stick would give, and the boulder crush him in his sleep, he protected the balancing act with a wakeful eye.

As the night’s silence fled the early day Jinx continued the
debate of whether to leave his room or stay. But the walking stick was bowing, and he knew that it would not hold for much longer. He stood at the open doorway, contemplating if he should yell the old man’s name, but brushed the thought aside with the hallway’s uncomfortable peace.

He turned around and observed the straining stick fade and reappear as the sole light bulb above flickered. Then the shape shifting murals on the walls began to grow dark and morbid, clustering closer and ready to attack. With increasing claustrophobia, Jinx decided to open the second door that was muffling the noises of hustle and bustle on the other side.

The locks were more rusted froze than the first door. He needed to pound on a few before they turned. One of the hinges broke as he jerked the door wide. A young boy stood in front of him with his fist cocked back, ready to knock, and his other hand holding the handle of a red wagon loaded with three wooden boards.

“Hello sir,” the little boy said.

“What do you want little boy? Are you lost?” Jinx asked, while shifting his hip to block the little boy’s attempt to peek inside.

“I’m not the one whose lost mister,” the boy said, inviting himself in barely missing Jinx with the wagon. “By the looks of your door, I guessed your rock was pretty big. That’s why I came here. Oh yes, there it is. That sure is a nasty rock mister.”

The walking stick snapped. Jinx scrambled back to his boulder and cusped it before it could lean too far and fall.

“Can you run and get your mom or dad little boy?”

“Nope, but you can borrow these,” the boy said, picking up the first plank from his wagon. The boy set one end precisely into a groove on the dirty floor and gave it a good stomp, then notched the other end to the lower side of the bulky stone. He did the same with the other two boards to form a tripod.

Jinx released his grip and let the blood drain from his face. “Thank you. But what are you doing here?” Jinx asked, staring at the young boy curiously. “Do you just walk around helping strangers with their boulders?”
“Sometimes. Especially when I find one like yours. I don’t want mine to get that bad,” the boy said with an assuredness Jinx couldn’t stop from envying.

“You said borrow. When do you want me to give you back these boards?” Jinx asked.

The boy scooped the long handle of his wagon and made his way out the door. “I don’t want them back sir. Use them for someone else’s rock when you don’t need’em anymore.” The little boy’s untied shoelace flapped about as he skipped away with the wagon bouncing after him. “You might want to get that rock a little smaller sir. They’re easier to balance when they’re smaller . . .,” the boy continued, his voice trailing off as he vanished into the infinite corridor outside, leaving Jinx amazed at the child’s care-free nature.

Jinx shouted, “What’s your name!” But his question was only answered with silence.

His boulder now secured, Jinx patted the dust off his pants and shirt, and used the puddle in the far corner of the room to wipe the soot from his skin. Excited for a chance to set out and explore the places outside his lonely cave, the walls and ceiling swirled with delightful images of the hopeful encounters that await. He thought he saw some color developing around his doorways. But the images quickly turned dark, erotic, and violent. A woman stepped through the same doorway the child had recently left.

“Hey Jinxy baby,” she said, twirling her hair extensions with her clawed fingernails while playfully twisting her figure. “It’s been a long time. I’ve missed you so much.”

“Hey Cherri. How have you been?” Jinx greeted her ruefully.

“Wah, look at your rock! It’s so nice, and big . . . and this stand . . .,” she continued while making her way around, petting his boulder and softly scraping the bumps and ridges with her nails. Her hands stopped when they found the new boards and rapped her fingers while she spoke. “I sure could use one of these pieces of wood for my rock. The people holding it up now keep getting tired and disappearing. I tell you what. Let me have one or two of these pieces of wood, and I will put a memory on that wall that you
won’t forget for a long, long time--right here, right now. You won’t even have to leave the room,” she said, before licking her red painted upper lip with an abnormally long tongue.

“Well, I don’t know, it’s a new stand, and the support hasn’t even settled yet,” Jinx tried to explain, as the scent of her musk caused his boulder to shake.

“Look, you can use that stick,” Cherri said. She picked up the walking stick from the floor, bending it straight, and stroking it lightly.

“It’s broken,” said Jinx.

“I have tape. We can just tape it tight, and let the games begin,” she said, taunting Jinx’s crotch with her hand.

Jinx mustered all his self-control. “No Cherri. I have some things I gotta do. You need to leave now.”

“Hmph,” Cherri pouted. Her flirty demeanor switched to a mode that Jinx recognized all too well, knowing that nothing good-natured would come of it. “Oh, so I’m not worth a piece of wood, Jinx? Are you sure that taking a ride on this isn’t worth one measly piece of lumber?” she said as she turned her back-side towards him and bent over, placing her hands on one of his boards, tempting him with an advertisement of what he was going to miss beneath the bottom of her tiny shorts.

Jinx thought about telling her that she could use the walking stick instead, but then she suddenly popped up with the board in both hands and swung it with baseball player form, smashing it into his ear and temple. Jinx dropped to the ground and watched as Cherri took two of the boards and push his rock to the ground, his vision blurring her escape before everything went black.

Jinx awoke later that day unsure if he could go on. No longer caring if his light bulb went out, he pondered if he should be the one to break it himself, inviting the darkness in forever. He was tired, and imagined no escape from the shameful space he was trapped in.

He rolled onto his back with a moan while trying to ignore a gentle knock from the third door. The rhythmic tapping lasted for hours, entrancing him as it grew louder and louder. The knocking
developed a deep bass, vibrating the walls and forcing a lifetime of horrible visages to dissipate, turning all the surfaces in the room blank.

He crawled to the door and sat slumped on bended knees. Staring at the knob, he struggled to lift his hand to turn it, but a glimmer of hope arose as the visages of the old man and the small boy smiled at him from both sides of the doorframe. Using his last ounce of energy, the energy he was planning to use for breaking his light bulb, he threw his arm up and latched his hand onto the knob. Jinx twisted it only enough for the door to open a crack before letting his limp arm fall back to his lap.

Electricity prickled his body as two voices spoke in unison. “It’s about time. Do you know how long we’ve been knocking at this door?”

They continued to banter from behind the cracked opening. “I didn’t know if he was ever going to open it,” a man’s voice reverberated Jinx’s chest.

“Oh yes you did silly, you were more excited than I was,” a woman’s words chirped like a bird song.

Once again synchronized, they asked, “Are you going to invite us in Jinx? We have been waiting out here for quite some time now.” Their words filled the room with fresh air, and made the hairs stand on the back of Jinx’s neck and forearms.


The robe of the tall man smelled of cedarwood as it brushed Jinx’s shoulder when he walked past. The woman crouched down and lifted Jinx’s chin to inspect him with her eye contact, her face round and clear and glowing with life. She lifted him off his knees and hugged his limp body like a mother would her own child who she had not seen in years.

The man went directly to the boulder and picked it up with one hand like a basketball. “Hey Mother, look at this thing,” he said, somehow spinning the enormous rock on one finger, a layer of dust and sand flying off as he blew on it to make it spin faster.

“Oh, we are going to have to do something about that. Yes, we
will,” she said.

Confused, yet cradled in the serenity of their presence, Jinx remembered seeing the two long ago when he shared in the festivities of the rooms that belonged to joyous families he had visited when he was younger. Some rooms had images of the two imprinted on their walls, always smiling, undisturbedly, same as they stand in the pulsating despair of Jinx’s room.

Jinx’s walls became smothered with blurred scenes: childhood birthday parties, fishing with his grandfather, winning a wrestling trophy, along with other good times. The Great Man glanced around dissatisfied. He gave Jinx’s boulder a hard bounce off the floor, shedding more dirt and a few hard flakes. The images focused and gained vibrant colors.

“Who are you two?” Jinx asked.
“Who are you two?” he asked again.

“Everybody,” the man added as he straightened Jinx’s shoulders and squirreled his hair.

“What do I call you?”

The woman redirected the conversation. “The names are irrelevant my child. What is important is this place, and if you want to be in it. If you want to be here alone. Do you want to be here?”

Jinx cocked his head as he watched the Great Man mumble inaudibly to his rock, placing it next to his ear and giggling as if listening to an inside joke. Then the Great Man lobbed the stone back onto the rotting pedestal, perfectly balanced despite its disproportion.

“I’ve hated being here for so long, but right now I don’t mind it much at all now that you two are here. Can you stay? Everyone else seems to come and go.” Jinx replied.

“As long as you like,” the two spoke again in unison. “You can keep us right there,” they both pointed at the fourth wall with no door, “and hold us there as long as you can.” They gave Jinx a wink as they walked into the wall, molding the cold stone hardness into a flowing mural of themselves, illuminated by a newfound glow from Jinx’s lightbulb.

All three doors stayed open for days, but nobody came. He
visited with the Great Man and Mother on his wall for hours every day, learning of things he never knew he did not know. Until one afternoon, his conversation was interrupted by the clang of metal on metal. It was a chisel striking the doorknob, and the hand holding it belonged to an intellectual woman wearing glasses, brown boots, cargo shorts, and a loose denim shirt.

“I heard you talking to your wall, then I saw your rock and thought you might be ready to do some excavating,” the woman said, waving her chisel in one hand and wrist-twisting a mallet in the other.

Jinx answered her with a smile that stretched newly strengthened cheek muscles. “If I have learned only one thing this last week, it’s to be open to just about anything ma’am. But what are we chiseling?”

“Ha, ha, ha.” The woman thought the remark a joke until Jinx’s eyes revealed his sincerity. “Oh . . . yeah . . . sorry. Sometimes I assume too much. You have never chiseled before. I should have known by the size of your rock,” she said, somewhat embarrassed.

“My rock has dropped from that pedestal hundreds of times and nothing has ever come off, except for when this guy started bouncing it like a toy,” Jinx explained, pointing to the Great Man on the wall, who waved at the woman like an old friend.

“Yeah, he’ll do that. But he cannot do it all for you, not here that is, not with your rock that big. Don’t you think it would be easier to balance that monstrosity on your pedestal if it were smaller? Anyway, here you go,” she said.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Jinx gripped the tools and began pounding the ore. After much time and exertion, barely a grain of sand had been loosened. The Great Man on the wall snickered as Mother jabbed him with her elbow. Frustrated, Jinx pounded harder and harder, and only stopped when the hammer hit his thumb and sent the chisel flipping across the room.

“It’s not working,” Jinx balked.

“Well it’s not the chisel,” she said, pushing up her glasses and picking up the tool from the floor. “You must find the proper points to pry.”
“I don’t know how to do that,” said Jinx.
“You simply need to look closely, goof. They are almost impossible to detect if you look at them all at once. See?” she said, pointing the chisel at a particularly gnarly bulge in the top of the rock.
“See what? It’s just part of the rock.”
“Look very close,” she instructed.
Jinx did as she said. He took a deep breathe to relax, looked at the two in his wall and received a reassuring nod. Then he put his face close to the bulge and squinted. As his eyes adjusted to the miniature landscape, he began to make out tiny words formed by the different bumps and grains. The minuscule trenches and lines and indents formed puny letters and phrases. His heart wrenched as he read the words.

Everyone teased me relentlessly for two years in middle school. I didn’t understand why, or how to react. It hurts so bad. . . . I was left outside the roller rink all night because my mom fell asleep . . . the world taught me to hate myself . . .

Jinx was more than ready to chisel at the revealed seams surrounding these phrases to be removed from his rock. He chipped at them, knocked them loose, and tossed the heavy fragments through the air. The Great Man in the wall mimicked the motion of a skeet shooter, swinging an invisible rifle, taking aim, and pulling the trigger to blast the unwanted chunks in midflight.

Jinx looked at the place where the pieces had been, now smoother and slightly rounded. “That wasn’t so hard,” Jinx said, celebrating his success. Wishing he had found a chisel a long time ago, he eagerly searched for more pieces to remove.

The girl carried on, “It can get more difficult the closer you get to the center. Some say, in the middle is an amazing jewel. Like a bright shining diamond, or sapphire. It differs from person to person. The trick is, to keep the rock well rounded. Which isn’t as easy as you would think when you get to the parts you don’t want to look at.”

Jinx worked his chisel fervently for weeks, removing horrible chunks he had forgotten, and opening emotions he never knew
were beneath. Some were painful, but others joyful and could stay.

He continued his excavation, only pausing to meet and chat with an increasing flow of new people who came to visit his room. Some would stop by to simply say hello, but many helped. Each adding some attribute to improve his space. One fellow helped Jinx with his flooring, removing the ruble and tacking down tiles in a unique pattern. A woman who created a beautiful chandelier for his light bulb eventually became his wife, making his light shine brighter than it ever had before. Others helped tear down one of his walls and build a library in the new open area. Another taught Jinx how to manifest different things from his walls, like chisels and other tools that he could give away to other people who were struggling with large rocks like he had. Even Cherri visited to return the boards she had stolen and apologized for hitting him in the head.

The more who came, the more magnificent his pedestal grew. What was once a cracked and unstable stand, became a monument of strength, a resolute table charged with the simple task of holding a precious stone that Jinx could easily toss and skip across water if he wanted. His room became a home, and a friend of sorts, a place he grew to love again, and proud enough to let people visit.

No longer fearing his rock would drop, he explored the vast rooms and halls and interesting places outside of his own space; always keeping a searching eye for a decaying door, or someone struggling with a large rock or a dwindling pedestal.

Many years passed and Jinx had outlived his amazing wife and many friends. His children visited less and less as responsibilities busied their worlds, slowly growing their rocks into dangerous shapes. Although the Great Man and Mother kept him company on his wall, loneliness or fear would sometimes push one of his doors closed. But he always found that the best remedy was to walk through that door.

One morning, a blanket of discomfort fell upon him during the last bites of his breakfast, and the door in front of him began to move. He opened a window to replace the smell of bacon with the fresh aroma from a lilac bush growing outside. He grabbed one of
his many walking sticks from a barrel before exiting the halfway closed door.

He didn’t need to go far before finding an unnaturally dim hallway. A thumping and grunting echoed from an open doorway at the far end. A dreadful cry cringed his approach, but he shuffled his feet faster until he stood in the doorway of the forsaken room; his gaze fixed upon a young man sprawled across an enormous boulder which had fallen from its pedestal.

“Hello? Can I come in?” he asked the young man sincerely.

“Why would you want to come in here?” the young man sneered.

“Heard ya’ yellin’ and givin’ that rock the business. Looks like you could use some help. Do you mind?” he smiled, almost losing his dentures with the kind gesture.

“I don’t know how you can help old man. But sure, come on in.”

“What’s your name young man?” asked the Old man.

“Jinx. What’s yours?”

“Ah yes, of course, Jinx. Good to meet you Jinx. My name is . . . Robert,” the Old man lied with pride. Remembering what it was like, he knew it was time to get to work. “Alright Jinx get off your ass and let’s get that rock back up there!”
SIMPLY SOBER

THE END . . .
OR BEGINNING