

The Brick
by
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When Donald Whittie got up on the morning of the fourth, he never even suspected that by the end of the day he would be almost insane. He never even considered it. When he sat down to his corn flakes heaped with sugar and thought about his day, going insane didn't even make the list. He thought he'd clean up the back yard, fix the toilet, and settle back to a long afternoon nap, then it was prime time television until he fell asleep again. Well, that was his plan anyway.

The rain had stopped and when Donald stepped onto his back porch a fresh, clean smell surrounded him like one of those towels in any fabric softener ad. He could almost hear the dryer going. He toyed for a moment of putting off the spring cleaning another week, but no, it was warm and sunny for the first time in days and he should at least pick up a bit. Maybe raking the leftover leaves from last fall could be put off. What did they hurt?

That was settled. By putting off the raking he was saving himself at least 4 hours, which he decided to spend picking up the breakfast dishes and watching cartoons. Then, if he didn't doze off he'd get started on the yard.

Five hours later he was outside again with an old plastic grocery bag peeling wet matted paper off of the drying mud where, despite his best efforts, grass would not grow. He decided that when he was done raking next week he would get bold and put down grass seed again. If he took good care of it, there was no reason he shouldn't have a grassy yard. It really didn't look bad with all the winter trash picked up, and would look even better raked, it's just that no grass seemed to want to grow anymore. It grew near the fences where the vacant houses on either side of him had long, jungle-like grass growing, almost as if it were just spilling over like water.

The water analogy reminded him that he had planned to fix the toilet as well, but he would forget all about that in a few minutes. He would forget a lot of things.

He picked up his folding beach chair where it lay under the snow for three months and wished it wasn't so muddy. It was the last thing soiling his yard and he decided to call it a day. As he walked up to his back porch something caught his eye. He didn't think nothing of it for a split second, but then it changed his life.

It was a brick.

To describe it was simple. It was a single red brick. The small type that is usually used to build a wall or chimney but that Donald had used to mark off where his garden was three years ago. He had a stack of them on his back porch, and up to now, they had never been anything special. Just annoying things that kept getting in the way. But this one was incredibly different.

It was floating.

It was about five feet off the ground, just hanging there as if it were the most natural thing in the world. It didn't bob or drift or do anything except just sit there rock steady, if rock steady were possible five feet off the ground.

Donald's hand let go of the chair he was holding although he wasn't aware that he did. He took a step or two closer and his head unexplainedly tilted to one side. There were no strings, no poles, no computerized special effects, just a brick. He reached out to it but then pulled his hand back.

What if when he touched it, it fell?

Instead, he ended up waving his hand over it, then under it, then around it. He walked to the far side and repeated the same motions. Fear was the last emotion he expected to creep on him but creep up on him it did.

What forces of heaven or earth was at work here?

Donald stood there breathing, as if breathing were something that was suddenly so important that he had to think about. He had never thought about breathing much but now it seemed very, very important that he think about it. Yes, think about breathing. It also seemed very important to think about the Earth in general, as that was where all of reality usually happened and it seemed vitally important to verify that this is where he currently was. After all, in reality bricks did not float in mid air.

Peripheral vision was used to check that his house was still there, and his backyard fence. His central vision was occupied with the brick. Donald was afraid that if he took his eyes off of it, it would disappear, or worse. Slowly, a pain in his back reminded him of just how long he had been standing there which in turn reminded him that hadn't actually come to terms with the situation yet.

What was the situation, he thought. Here he was, a perfectly normal accountant, standing in a perfectly normal yard, staring at a perfectly normal brick that he knew he couldn't take a picture of. That last part came into his thoughts suddenly. He remembered back to when he was a kid and he tried to take a picture of a rocking chair that was rocking on it's own. He snapped lots of pictures of it. Then he discovered that if closed the door it would stop rocking and when he opened the door it would start back up again. Scientific analysis of the situation revealed a breeze so slight he couldn't feel it. A major discovery for a ten year old. Weeks later, when the film came back he wondered why he had so many pictures of a rocking chair then remembered that it was supposed to be rocking. Even as a ten year old, he felt foolish that he didn't realize that you couldn't actually photograph something like that. You actually had to film it or something.

He remembered that whole episode without taking his eyes off of the brick. How could he prove that this was happening and who could he prove it to? A video camera never seemed important to Donald before. What, he always thought, would he ever video tape? He thought he ought to call a scientist but realized that wasn't as easy as it sounded, after all, how do you just call a scientist? Especially a gravity scientist, which seemed to be the kind you'd want to call in this situation. Should he call someone from work? As he really didn't have any friends and his family lived several states away that was all he could think of. No one from work had ever been to his house before and he'd have to give directions and even the pizza guy had trouble finding it and they'd take forever to get here and...and...and...

Donald had to get a grip on himself. He was losing it. The thought of him losing it made him smile. Hadn't he already lost it when he found this brick hanging here against all odds?

He reached out to it again. No one to tell, no one to believe him, no way to prove it. He was deathly afraid that if he took his eyes off of it that it would disappear or fall or whatever. He was keenly aware that this couldn't last forever and that eventually he would have to look away. He'd have to go in and get a drink sooner or later. Hunger would come next then the urge to go to the bathroom. Then Monday would come and he'd have decide to go to work or not.

Anger came next and it came on hard. Why him? Why now? This was obviously the most important thing that had ever happened in the history of the Earth and he was lonely accountant that nobody would listen to. A brick? Doing What? Oh, yeah, we'll come right over after lunch with some white jackets and your permanent record. Dammit, he was nobody. He could picture the headlines, "Man missing for weeks found in his own home. No one thought of looking there." Donald hated the people at work for not even caring enough to look for him.

Losing his grip again. It was funny how the train of thought works. One minute he was staring at a brick and the next he was afraid that he would die alone and unnoticed. Very slowly he reached out towards it again.

As lightly as he could, he touched it.

Nothing happened. It didn't move. He very, very lightly brushed his finger from one end to the other and it felt perfectly brick-like. Working off of this success he brushed the bottom of it, then the top. It was just as solid as it would be sitting on a shelf, or more likely, a work bench. He touched it again on it's side, applying just a little pressure. Not even enough to move it if were really sitting on a bench. Then he applied pressure to the top.

It fell.

Donald fell back as if a bomb exploded. His ankles hit the pile of bricks before his back hit the wall resulting in an awkward skid to the ground. He lay there staring at the brick that was now just laying on the ground like a perfectly normal brick that had just been dropped. For some reason, the history of the Earth passed before his eyes, then his life passed in comparison to it all.

Laying on the ground, alone and cold, Donald began to cry.