

Wood Chip Freddy and the Plastic Foot Rest

They were all looking at the newcomer real suspiciously when it arrived. Not sure what it was, but it sure wasn't like the rest of them.

The tall bookshelf had a first mean thought, "if I fall forward I'll flatten it for sure. Then Owner will take it away and everything will be just as it was. We don't want any change around here."

Owner never had bolted Book Shelf to the wall. He was pretty sure he could get himself rocking enough to fall forward. He took a couple tentative rocks then backed against the wall. Once he actually had fallen forward, when Owner hadn't pushed that big book back in far enough. What was it called? Oh yeah, Dictionary. Book Shelf had strained in silence for hours, trying to keep as much weight on his heels as he could, but he had been out of balance because of Dictionary, and eventually he had fallen forward clear down to Floor. It had been more scary than painful and he hadn't cracked a board or anything horrible like that. Cracking a board is everyone's worst nightmare. Because a crack only gets worse and eventually you can't do your job anymore. Then Owner doesn't want you anymore either. And you're sent away and you get replaced. Where you go to none of the furniture knew, but they all knew they didn't want to find out.

Book Shelf thought back on that one and only fall. Scary as it had been, he had ended up shelves down against Floor for hours. That had actually been a very pleasant time. Floor was a lovely light brown hardwood with a glossy wax shine. Owner always took extra care of Floor. Some of the other furniture were jealous, but not Book Shelf. He could contentedly gaze upon Floor's glossy finish for hours. And that one time he fell, Book Shelf had reveled in Floor's smooth soft boards along the length of his own grain. They had bonded, Book Shelf and Floor, that day. And that bond held unbroken even long after Owner had hoisted Book Shelf back to his place against the wall.

Of course you know that wood can't talk, but you probably didn't know that it can think and feel. Maybe not as people would, but somehow. Maybe. Who knows? In this story, wood can think and feel. And it can share thoughts and feelings with other wood. Just walk quietly through a forest grove on a cool spring morning as the rising sun sends its sustenance to all living things. You feel the sun's warmth on your skin and draw it deep into your bones. Ahhh... So too, do the trees and shrubs feel it. First on their leaves and bark, then down into their branches, trunks, and roots. And if you stop amidst an opening in the foliage where the sun strikes skin, close your eyes and feel it on your face. Raise your arms high and extend your fingers sunward. Slow down your thoughts, for thoughts move just as people do, only faster. But if you slow down your body, your thoughts can slow down too. Just stand there, rooted as a tree. Breathe. Feel the sun sink inside you. Be a tree. Then, with patience, you will sense as they do.

Yes, wood can feel alright and Book Shelf had strong feelings for Floor. But now his sylvan scene of Floor lain out before him, which reminded Book Shelf of something he couldn't quite remember, from some earlier life perhaps, was blighted by this very unwood-like alien. Whatever it was, it didn't belong. Book Shelf rocked a bit without even realizing he was doing so. That thing had to go!

The table and chairs, all wood, agreed with Book Shelf. So did Desk. And big Picture Frame, a heavy mahogany and rather snobbish about it, embracing a painted portrait of Owner's ancestor, made his feelings known to all the wood in the room. Almost every bit of furniture in the room, a small library in a comfortable, but not overly large farmhouse, was made of wood. Even the twins,

overstuffed club chairs, Owner's favorites for reading or discussing poetry with a friend over a glass of sherry, had strong wooden frames.

And then there was Freddy. We'll call him Freddy even though wood doesn't use proper names. In the forest, trees are known by their type such as oak or elm. In the home, they embrace their use or function such as chair or table. But Freddy didn't have a function. You see, Freddy was a wood chip. He was a leftover from an IKEA do-it-yourself furniture building project gone bad. Owner had tried it once, failed miserably, and never used IKEA again. All of the furniture had watched in fascination as the project began only to become horrified when Owner had suddenly lost his temper and hurled a piece of pine across the room and against the wall, narrowly missing Big Picture Frame. Owner had gone quiet and still for a moment while they all held their breath. Then Owner had quickly cleaned all of the pine parts and materials out of the library, never to be seen again. Some of the pine pieces had wept as they left and the library furniture had all sobbed with them. But they could do nothing to help because they weren't mobile. The eternal frustration and futility of flora, immobility. For all of them, from their first earliest awareness as seed on to sapling they knew of the things that weren't wood, that weren't melded into Mother Earth as they were.

Anyway, left behind after the IKEA cleanup was Freddy. He had been born from the crashing collision of a hurled IKEA table leg against the library wall. That table leg had fallen harmlessly within the ample arms of Sofa. But Freddy had broken free from the table leg, flew fast against the edge of Big Picture Frame, then ricocheted across the room, hitting Floor with a three hop landing before sliding along her smooth surface into a corner almost, but not quite, against the baseboard. For a long while he lay there alone collecting dust and fuzzies. Well, not all alone. Floor was aware of him, but none of the others were. You see, Freddy was so small that his thoughts couldn't reach the rest of the furniture. But small as he was, he lay upon Floor. And she was a good listener was Floor. She heard him and let him know that he wasn't alone. That he wasn't so small that he was overlooked. That he was loved. And when her thoughts sang out to all of the furniture that stood upon her, soothing as her thoughts and feelings always were, Freddy rested at peace, knowing that her song was as much for him as for the biggest pieces in the library.

Right now Freddy wasn't in the corner. Freddy had actually been all over the room since he was born. Remember when I said that Owner took extra special care of floor? Well part of that care was sweeping his beloved Floor twice a week. Freddy had been swept more times than he cared to think on. Actually, being swept the first time was fun and exciting. The sensation of speed, which the plant world simply didn't know, was a thrill for Freddy. At first. But then he had been scooped up into a dustpan and the sudden separation from Floor had been terrifying. Only when the plastic dustpan had been tapped against the rim of the trash can to empty it, had Freddy been bounced onto the trash can's rim, where he teeter-tottered for a very long second, then he had fallen outside and blessedly back to Floor. What a relief that had been! Another time Freddy had been swept to the dustpan but didn't get over the lip of the pan. Just at that point Owner had stopped to answer the phone. Freddy just lay there, half on the lip of the dustpan and half on floor. The waiting had been agony for him. What would happen? He would have panicked completely if not for Floor's soothing song. Yet there was something else Freddy sensed. He almost wasn't aware that it was there at all until Owner had come back and retrieved the dustpan without giving that final sweep that would have forced Freddy away from Floor forever. What a relief that had been. Sometimes it really helps to be small. And Freddy really was small, even for a wood chip. Any smaller and he would have been called a splinter.

Anyway, when Owner had taken the dustpan away that something else that Freddy had sensed went away too. Maybe it came from the plastic dustpan. Freddie couldn't take any meaning from

whatever it was. We'll call it a vibration. Yes, that's it. Not a thought, not a feeling, not a song, but a vibration. And it hadn't been entirely bad when Freddy had thought about it, whatever it was. It just wasn't wood-like. Several other times since then, Freddy had come in close contact with the dustpan but had still managed to avoid being swept out of the library forever. And every time he had sensed the same vibration. Then Freddy suddenly thought of something. What if these plastic things had thoughts and feeling too? Maybe the plastics just spoke a different language than the wood. So different that the wood couldn't recognize it as thought or feeling at all. That must be it!

Right now Freddy was sitting squarely under one of the legs of the plastic footrest, because that is what the alien thing was, so the strange vibration was coming in loud and clear. Now that he knew what to listen for. And he was also hearing floor's song at the same time. It seemed to Freddy that the pulse of the plastic fit somehow with the rhythm of Floor. Like a backbeat. This was way cool to Freddy. He got all excited and started to radiate his excitement all around him. Of course he was too little for anyone to notice him but Floor. She tuned into Freddy right away. And being wise, she soon realized the source of the backbeat herself and began to blend it into her song. Then all of the furniture in the room recognized it, and coming through Floor, accepted it. Some only begrudgingly at first, particularly Big Picture Frame, but soon all of the wood in the library accepted the contribution of the plastic footrest.

Book Shelf, who had first wanted to destroy the little footrest, was quick to realize his mistake and embrace the new comer. And could Book Shelf have ever disagreed with Floor anyway? Of course he couldn't, but more than that Book Shelf was good wood. And just like good people, good wood can be badly mistaken. And just like good people, they can learn better and become better in the learning. So it was with Book Shelf and all of the wood in the library.

And what of Wood Chip Freddy? He was still too little to be noticed by any of the wood furniture. But nestled within the loving embrace of Floor and his new friend Foot Rest, he was content and happy.

He had rhythm,

He had backbeat,

He had his Floor,

Who could ask for anything more.