

The Wrinkle in the Rug

The Wrinkle in the Rug

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For an OCD man bent on perfection, a strange flaw turns strange and deadly.



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Everything was as it should be. Everything was always as it should be for Neal D. Pense, MD. Everything from his polished French Aubercy designer shoes to his extensive alphanumeric library was exactly as they should be.

Modern society would deem it difficult for a hard working, brilliantly successful surgeon such as Neal to take care of his estate by himself. Yet even from the time Neal was young, no maid, servant or army of servants could keep his house. Not his home, his clothes or any one of his cars. Neal was the kind of man that needed perfection. Everyday, hours were spent cleaning, polishing, tilting and perfecting every surface, picture and plant.

Neal had no doubt he was a bit compulsive. He was fairly sure he would be diagnosed as OCD even. He slaved over his work by day then he came home and bit by bit perfected his personal life. With each passing day his estate neared perfection. Though logically it made no sense, Neal could see that the closer his home came to this perfection, the more successful he was becoming as a surgeon.

When he finally had reached the point he only had to occasionally dust the tops of surfaces, and everywhere he looked he saw order at home, his new surgical technique reached perfection and acclaim. Almost overnight he was propelled to medical stardom and his entire life was in order; until a late February evening.

It had been a night like any other. He was finishing his evening, like every other evening, drinking a glass with three fingers of a quite pretentious, but well deserved Dalmore scotch. Since reaching success, he found he much liked the finer pleasures. Neal was walking inside from the third floor patio when his heart leaped, his chest heaved and his lungs stopped. He very nearly dropped the empty glass to the oak wood floor.

There, in the middle of his well kept library, in the middle of his eighteenth century Celtic area rug, was a long, thin, straight wrinkle. It stood in a straight line about two inches high and about six inches long. It looked as if a decent sized snake were hiding under his rug.

A snake in his home was a preposterous thought. Lack of even a preposterous explanation made the wrinkle in his rug a far more alarming find; such things simply did not happen. The most preposterous aspect was that it certainly had not been there when he first crossed the library to the patio for his evening scotch.

He felt his nerves tingle as his eyes darted from one corner of the rug to the next. Yes, there was no denying the wrinkle, but all four corners of the rug were perfectly aligned with the walls and bookshelves, as if the wrinkle had not set the rug off kilter.

Also preposterous; one side or corner had to be offset for the wrinkle to exist.

He carefully set down his glass on a bookshelf and walked onto the exceptional rug. He ran his free hand through his short blonde hair which was beginning to turn more white than blonde with each passing year. Graying early is a tax the exceptional often have to pay. Neal brought his foot down in the middle of the wrinkle and the area under his foot caved and lay flat as it should. The small amount of wrinkle on either side of his foot continued to stand, though. When he lifted his foot, the middle of the pestering wrinkle rose just as it had been. Neal felt his forehead break out in a light sweat. He hated sweating. Sweating was an unexceptional trait and an uncontrollable change to ones appearance and body odor. Now, on top of fixing this rug, he would have to take a fifteen minute long shower.

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This was a very large, very heavy antique rug perfect in size and craftsmanship for his library. He turned from the wrinkle, walked to one corner and began to studiously inspect the outside border of the rug looking for the inconsistency that would create such a vexatious wrinkle. As he stooped, walking in a large square he could find nothing but the perfect dimensions. It grieved him as the answer became clear. Some fabric in the rug had come loose in the middle, stretching and creating the wrinkle. He could not perfectly explain it, but it was explanation enough to get rid of the rug, donate or sell it to someone else, it was still worth a small fortune even if it was not good enough for his library.

He relented to try and mend the rug one more time. It really was his favorite area rug- dark gray, antique, hand stitched with red lines in designs that were perfectly symmetrical. The attention to symmetry had been one of its key selling points.

He came up to the appalling little inconsistency and slowly lowered himself to his hands and knees. With both hands he attempted to flatten and smooth the imperfection rubbing at it three times. The lift gave way under pressure but then returned again when his hand moved or lifted off of the area. Soon he was panting as rubbed the wrinkle three more times with all of his weight as if he were scrubbing a floor. The wrinkle persistently rose back up against him. It was as if the wrinkle were challenging his greatness by refusing to bend to his will.

He stood up spitting a dirty exclamation at the inconsistent nuisance and turned away, pinching the bridge of his nose taking a long deep breath. His night was ruined and he felt intent on correcting this flaw in his home. He looked back at the wrinkle in the middle of his perfect library and squinted back at it with connivance.

Storming from the room he soon returned with a steam iron. This was the same high quality iron he used on his starched pants and shirts. Unsure if it was safe to use such an iron on an old rug like this he acquiesced that it could not damage it much worse. He set the hot plate against one side of the crease and, as he pushed the iron forward, the wrinkle slid forward out of reach.

He sat up straight on his knees, blinking uncomprehending. The fabric should not behave that way. He scooted forward and again tried to run the iron forward over the length of the wrinkle and again the wrinkle retreated away just out of reach of the hot plate. He angrily slid around the rug to the opposite side of the crease and ran the iron at it from the opposite direction.

Again the wrinkle effortlessly slid away from the steaming heat of the iron.

While all of this perplexed Neal D. Pense, the next thing that happened jostled his sanity. With the smell of aged singing fabric in his nose he ran the iron forward, through the middle of the wrinkle in a smooth, swift motion. The middle lay smooth and flat under the iron splitting the wrinkle in half. In a very swift motion, the two separate wrinkles shot away from each other. He lifted the iron and sat up again watching the wrinkles speed away. Then, in two smooth arcs, they returned to each other and met in the middle again. The reunited Wrinkle stood poised a few feet away from where it had once been.

The iron fell from Neal's hand. With an unsteady hand he took his glasses from his face and blinked a few times rubbing one eye. He was having trouble comprehending what had just happened. The Wrinkle was almost quivering in place as if staring back at him, standing on its toes. The malevolent smite in his rug was taunting him. He could not explain how or why but he knew better than most when someone, or something, was pointing and laughing at him.

He stood up and in his anger kicked the iron off of the rug, scuffing his expensive shoe. He moved over to the nearest corner of the rug watching the Wrinkle all the while. He grabbed the fabric with both hands and lifted it with a heave and a toss folding the large area rug in two revealing the ground beneath the Wrinkle.

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Nothing was there.

He quickly came to his knees in front of the folded rug and began to inspect the bottom side. He could find nothing to explain this phenomena. He unfolded the rug and pulled it tight, caring less about the perfect symmetry to the rest of his library and more that the anomaly in his rug was gone. As the fabric lay flat though, there it was, a long raised line in the middle of the rug. It almost seemed to be bouncing in place, and it was definitely larger than it had been before. Now it lay twelve inches long and stood six inches high. There was no way to justify the existence of such a thing.

Neal exhaled once through his nose and saw red. He approached the Wrinkle and lifted his foot to stomp on it. As his foot came down, the Wrinkle slid, much like a snake in a curvy motion, around the foot he was standing on and his stomp came down on the already flat lying rug. He quickly spun around so he was facing the Wrinkle again crouched as if he were ready to pounce on it. The Wrinkle was again in place a short distance from him vibrating as if with laughter.

Was he insane? None of this made any logical sense. Fabric simply did not create motion of its own free will. Things were not as they should be!

He looked to his left and grabbed his wooden reading chair and lifted it up over his head in both hands. He took three short but quick steps forward and threw the chair down directly at the damned Wrinkle. It twitched, much like a rabbit might, suspecting danger, and bolted to the left. The chair splintered into pieces on the rug and the Wrinkle moved back to the right circling the large wreckage in the middle of the rug sliding away so the destroyed chair stood between it and Neal. It seems to shout, "Look what I made you do!"

Neal was trying not to count the number of broken pieces of chair on the floor or think of all of the trouble he would go through in finding another chair that would perfectly fit his Library. Not to mention all of the sweeping and vacuuming he would have to do to fix this room. Yes, he planned on vacuuming the rug clean. He would keep it. This Wrinkle, would be killed and his library would be perfect again as it was.

He ran at the Wrinkle to jump on it over the broken chair. The Wrinkle bolted to the side and as Neal tried to pursue it his feet tangled on a broken leg of the chair. He did not do a good job of catching himself on the ground and his head hit the rug with a considerable amount of force. He yelled in pain rising to his knees, holding his head with one hand. He opened his eyes again and seeing the Wrinkle, swung a hammering fist at it five times. He succeeded only in bruising his wrist as it swiftly jumped away from his barrage of blows.

Standing up on unsteady legs he kicked the bulk of the chair to the side out of his way. His mind raced for a solution. Perhaps he could scare the Wrinkle out of his rug. If it feared the heat of the iron so much, perhaps more heat could dispel it from his life. He searched his brilliant brain for a solution. He did not have a large enough iron or anything that would cover and press the rug from corner to corner.

The answer seemed so simple when it came to him.

He turned to the desk from which he had thrown the chair and opened the top right side drawer. Laying neatly in place next to his tobacco pipe was his box of matches. With numb fingers he lifted the matches out of the drawer all the while muttering, "Yes, yes, yes..." as he pulled a match from the box.

With an exasperated scrape against the tinder, he stood motionless, staring at the Wrinkle in the rug. The match burned bright and hot at his finger tip. He thought about throwing the match at it but instead touched it against the box full of matches. As the box began to burn in one corner he threw it at the Wrinkle. It only had to move a little to dodge the burning box, but as the rest of the matches caught fire a small spot of the rug erupted into flame. The Wrinkle began to zig-zag away from the source of the heat in a panic. It seemed to be

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looking from the burning spot then back to Neal in an accusatory stance.

"Yes!" Neal shouted as more of the rug began to catch fire spreading towards where the Wrinkle had run away to. The flames rose higher and the Wrinkle retreated to the farthest corner of the rug from the fire. Neal took set at it from behind with a jump. He came to the floor and reached for his iron driving it along the fabric at the Wrinkle. It seemed to sputter away from him fleeing uncertainly towards the flames. It then turned away in fear of the heat and stopped between the flames and Neal.

The room began to grow quite hot rather quickly.

Neal had it trapped between him and the fire that was spreading along the length of the fabric. It had no where to go now. As the flames neared and rose higher, the Wrinkle would try to move away towards Neal; he would then swing the iron at the Wrinkle and it would dodge back towards the very flames it was trying to avoid.

Neal found himself laughing through the smoke that filled his library. He looked away from the Wrinkle at the sound of crackling wood. One of his book shelves was catching fire and a few books had fallen to the ground like burning meteors.

He coughed hard and blinked through tears as more of his books ignited into ash and smoke. The binders and pages charred and curled billowing thick black smoke into the room. He stood, crouching under the thick of the smoke looking for where the Wrinkle had fled to. He took a step forward towards the fire, trying to see through the smoke and wavering heat. There the Wrinkle was, darting to and fro in a panic. The middle of the Wrinkle had caught fire.

It was almost comical. The Wrinkle was running wild as a man might with his hair on fire. The Wrinkle darted this way and that on its little remaining amount of rug; no matter where it went, the middle was on fire. Neal grit his teeth into a savage grin, ready to finally deliver the coup de gras. He waited as the terror wrought Wrinkle in his once perfect antique Celtic rug made its way to the corner he stood by. He lifted his foot and, with surgically brilliant, perfect timing, stomped down on the middle of the alight Wrinkle.

The crease vanished under his foot laying down flat and smooth, gone forever. Neal stood up straight and leaned back laughing with victory. He had done it. He had out smarted the demonic imperfection in his home. As he laughed at the Wrinkles demise, a new smell came to him through the smoke. It was a more sickly sweet odor that stung his nose. He slowly stopped laughing trying to detect the cause of the smell. Then he looked down suddenly in pain to see that his pant leg was on fire; alight from stomping the Wrinkle out of existence.

He cried loudly kicking his leg around to put out the flame. His khaki slacks only burned hotter as the flames were fanned by the kicking, stretching up to his knee. He fell to his knees as a forceful burst of flame and heat from the library blew at him. He raised both hands to guard his face from the explosion and crawled backwards away from the his once alphanumeric library. He brought himself to his feet and screamed as his entire lower body was now alight. As he staggered backwards trying to slap out his flaming pants with burned hands, he never noticed the the low railing of his third story patio.

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