

A GUILTY
CONSCIENCE

Nicholas Gordon

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A GUILTY CONSCIENCE

From: Andrew Dolittle <thedude101@hotmail.com>
To: Dante Espinoza <charmer11@yahoo.com>
Date: 9 Aug 2007
Re: Arrgh!!!

Thanks a lot! I had a mouse problem, now I have a python problem!

Last night I did what you said, took the thing out to cuddle with it, get it used to me, and bang! it shows me its fangs and hisses and I drop it, all six feet of it, and off it goes, slithering quick as a bunny for the nearest wall.

And now it's gone! Gone! Who knows where? Probably hunting for mice in the wall, happy as a clam.

What worries me is the guy right below me. He's a lawyer! And he's nuts! And he's had three heart attacks! So if he sees this thing slithering out of the wall at him, I'm cooked! I'm fried! I'm yesterday!

From: Eli Wynner <winnerwynner@gmail.com>
To: June Wynner <juneloveselvis@aol.com>
Date: 9 Aug 2007
Re: Ghosts

You say you don't believe in ghosts, but I'm

telling you, there's a ghost in this apartment. I actually saw it last night. Well, not actually saw it since it chose to be invisible. But I saw it move something.

I was as usual having a tough time getting to sleep (I know you say a guilty conscience needs no accuser) when I heard some eerie sounds coming from the living room, like someone bumping into things. Well, you know what I mess I have in there.

So I went to have a look, and when I flicked on the light one of the piles of books by my armchair suddenly spun half round like a record on a malfunctioning turntable.

Holy crap! I thought, and turned out the light. As if the thing couldn't see in the dark.

And then I felt the presence of evil in the room. I can't describe it any other way. An ancient, cold, remorseless, unstoppable evil permeating the air.

I backed out of the room and went back into bed to think about it. A ghost! Who was it? What did it want? How was I going to get rid of it?

My heart was pounding, and I thought: What if it comes in here? Maybe I should just leave. But where would I go? And for how long?

Maybe it wants revenge. Maybe it's out to scare me so much that I have another heart attack.

I decided that the main thing I had to fear was fear itself, and that calmed me down a little. I had to approach the situation scientifically. It's got to be someone's ghost. The ghost of someone I screwed big time. So I started going over all the people I've cheated over the years – as you know, a long, long list.

Not including you, of course, or any of my other exes, since you're all still alive, as far as I know. So I boiled it down to three really big-time victims, all of whom are no longer with us.

I decided to make restitution to each of them, one by one, starting with the least expensive (hope springs eternal). If the next night the ghost is gone, fine. If not, I'll have to move on to the next.

So what do you think? Sound like a plan?

From: Andrew Dolittle <thedude101@hotmail.com>
To: Dante Espinoza <charmer11@yahoo.com>
Date: 10 Aug 2007
Re: Get this thing outta here!

Next weekend? You're gonna come over next weekend? You got to be kidding me!

What if Cuddles crawls into Wynner's bed? And the guy's heart stops? And his kid or cousin or concubine sues me? What do I do then?

Don't tell me it's not an aggressive snake! It's a snake! And it's big! Get it outta here!!!

From: Eli Wynner <winnerwynner@gmail.com>
To: June Wynner <juneloveselvis@aol.com>
Date: 10 Aug 2007
Re: One Down

Yesterday I sent a check for \$14,873.33 to each of Ray Goldberg's three children. You remember Ray Goldberg. He was the guy whose suit I settled early

when I took you to Hawaii to make up for my first affair with Gloria.

Boy, was he pissed! He claimed he got only half of what he should have, but actually it was a third.

Well anyway, the ghost isn't Ray's. I sat in the armchair all night in the dark, waiting. I must have dozed off because around 3:00 in the AM I felt something cold and muscular touch my leg!

My heart pounding, I switched on the light, and the poltergeist practically lifted my chair! With me in it! I felt the center push up against my ass, as though a fist at the end of a long, sinewy arm pressed up against it and suddenly released!

"Who the hell are you?" I screamed at it. "Who? Who? What do you want? Tell me and I'll do it! Just tell me, for heaven's sake!"

Of course, no answer. The thing had done what it wanted to do. My heart felt like it was flip-flopping at the end of a broken spring.

I'd better get it right today! The second one on my list is Beryl Hyde. You remember – the widow I was trustee for. That's how I got the leg-breakers off my back.

Let's hope it's Beryl. I don't know how much more of this I can survive.

From: Eli Wynner <winnerwynner@gmail.com>

To: June Wynner <juneloveselvis@aol.com>

Date: 11 Aug 2007

Re: Two Down

It's not Beryl. I sold off my entire Hathaway portfolio and sent her grandnephew \$225,000 – that's with interest from 1983 – with instructions to distribute it as he thinks she would have intended.

Then I took up my living room vigil. I know it might sound stupid to haunt a ghost, as it were, but I want to know when the damned thing is gone.

I laid a copy of my letter to Beryl's grandnephew with my checkbook register on the coffee table, just in case the ghost wanted proof, and waited.

Nothing. All night, nothing.

"You were Beryl!" I shouted out loud to the dawn. "You haunted me out of every penny of my savings! But thank God you're finally gone! And I still have my annuity!"

I waited for the gray to turn a little brighter and went back to the bedroom hoping to salvage just a bit of sleep.

And there it was! It must have been lying in wait for me on the bed! As I entered the room the sheets began thrashing wildly, and then the night table starting rocking as though an earthquake were shaking the house.

I raced back into the living room and cowered in the armchair, waiting for it to come for me, waiting for the heart attack that I knew was imminent. But it never came. Eventually I fell asleep in the chair. I wasn't going to get back into that bed!

So it has to be Grandma. I never told you about Grandma. This was before we were married.

After Dad split with Mom and then disappeared, she made me the executor of her estate.

But her will left me only \$1,000 to compensate for being the executor. Every penny of the rest went to Beth Abraham – the nursing home that was taking care of her.

So when she was finally sinking into her last coma, I wrote up another will, reversing the priorities, and got her to sign it, telling her this was just a minor rewording to solve a technical problem in the previous will.

She was barely able to sign the thing, forget about checking to see whether I was telling her the truth. When she died I got enough money to buy into what later became my practice. Beth Abraham got the thousand bucks, which, by the way, they were very happy with.

Well, today I sold my pension. The whole thing. After taxes, that gives me \$843,295.27 – Grandma's legacy plus interest. The ghost had better be Grandma because now I'm clean, I've got nothing left. I'm going to be living on social security.

But my conscience is clean, too. Funny thing. I never felt guilty about anything I did, not to either the living or the dead. I figured that people with a conscience were just children who never grew up. You look around the world and you see what people do, and pretty soon you begin to wonder why you should be one of the only chumps.

But I feel right about this. The ghost is Grandma, and she's haunting me for a reason. There's

a power greater than me or the ghost, something that's making this happen, that makes everything happen for its own purpose in its own time.

From: Andrew Dolittle <thedude101@hotmail.com>
To: Dante Espinoza <charmer11@yahoo.com>
Date: 11 Aug 2007
Re: Yuck!

So I bought two dead mice from the pet store and I rubbed them all along the moldings of the living room walls, like you said. And I put them with the hide box beside the tank, and now I'm waiting.

This had better work! I can't believe you lent me Cuddles to get rid of mice and now I have to buy dead mice from the pet store to get rid of Cuddles!

From: Andrew Dolittle <thedude101@hotmail.com>
To: Dante Espinoza <charmer11@yahoo.com>
Date: 12 Aug 2007
Re: Cuddles is back!

Well, it worked! This morning the dead mice were gone and the thing was in the hide box, just like you said it would be.

So I picked up the hide box with the thing in it and put it back in the tank.

You'd better believe I'm not taking it out again! It's all yours! Come and get it!

I wonder if it ever did get down into Wynner's apartment.

From: Eli Wynner <winnerwynner@gmail.com>

To: June Wynner <juneloveselvis@aol.com>

Date: 12 Aug 2007

Re: Free at Last!

Yes! It was Grandma!

I spent the whole night walking back and forth between the living room and bedroom, with forays into the bathroom and kitchen – and nothing! The sense, the smell of evil is gone! I'm free!

Shows you what scientific method can do. Hypothesis, experiment, result, conclusion. Works every time.

Not that it didn't cost me. I'm down to social security. But I'm square with the world. Or at least with Ray, Beryl, and Grandma. I know I owe you, too, and a lot of other people. But you can't squeeze blood from a stone. I did what I could, under the circumstances. Thanks to the ghost.

But I forgot – you don't believe in ghosts.