



A *FLYMF* Ghost Story

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I had spent a long evening working on my latest story, an eerie tale of a man whose pants, one day, became too small. The clock was past that hour where it begins anew, and I felt mired in my studio apartment, my own shortcomings coating the walls like its cheap wallpaper.

I had just placed myself on my mattress; my eyes shut, I was cataloguing the day's missed opportunities: the novel I hadn't written, the neighbor I hadn't ridden, the stack of unread *New Yorker's* that continued to grow in the closet, their Anthony Lane reviews taunting my laziness like the man himself taunting their unloved subjects. I was a joke, but a sleepy joke in any case, and on the verge of drifting off when I heard a noise in my bathroom, just a few feet away.

It was a moan, low and terrible, repeated in a crescendo chorus and punctuated with occasional sprays from my aerosol deodorant. From the bathroom door wafted the subtle tones of musk and the thick stench of terror.

"God's sweet tooth," I murmured. I barricaded myself beneath my comforter, hoping the noise would go away, but it only grew louder. It began to rattle the mirror on my bathroom cabinet, reaching the point where I feared it would wake Ms. Crabblegraw, my downstairs nemesis.

Still stricken beneath my downy shield I was forced to choose between confronting the phantom in my bathroom and the possibility of Ms. Crabblegraw barging upstairs to complain. Remembering the unfortunate tendency of Ms. Crabblegraw's bathrobe to hang open at her midsection, I steeled my courage and charged into the bathroom.

The noise was gone, but the bathroom was filled with a strange aura, an evil humidity. My deodorant was uncapped on the counter, but everything else seemed to be in its place—the soap was in the soapdish, my towel was on the towel rack, and my plunger stood firm behind the toilet.

Not being able to afford a toothbrush or toothpaste, I had been reduced to using my own finger and some baking soda left in the refrigerator by the apartment's previous tenants, but the baking soda was exactly where I'd left it. Was my mind playing tricks on me?

As I pondered in the toilet I heard a steady clicking in the main room, then the burst of a gas burner leaping into flame. Rushing back to the main room I saw the sickly blue light of the range, and in its shimmer I saw a pale form, thin and human, that was topped by a large colonial wig. It was wearing a nightshirt, thankfully more substantial than Ms. Crabblegraw's, and as it turned towards me I felt my bowels loosen in a way that made me wish I hadn't put off

my toilet paper needs with a plan to steal more from Starbucks the next day.

"Who are you?" I stammered.

Wordlessly, the spectral form turned towards my refrigerator, which it opened and rummaged about in. Reappearing, it hoisted a sack of apples, then began to pelt me with them rather viciously.

The wig, the apples, it all made sense. "Eureka!" I shouted.

"Oh, don't try to conjure up that old fool," a shrill voice proclaimed. "Couldn't even come up with a coherent theory on optics."

"Isaac Newton!" I exclaimed.

"That's Sir Isaac Newton, you twat! Being surrounded by fools doesn't have many benefits, but having your superiority codified in a title is one of them, and I intend to have it recognized."

"But, what are you doing in my apartment?"

"Well, word of your efforts in the literary realm has reached me in the afterlife, and I've come to tell you how feeble these efforts are. You suck!"

I was speechless.

He continued. "How else can I put it? How about this—in a mere twenty-five years, you've managed to waste more people's time, yours and others, than most people do in a lifetime." He reached back into the fridge and pulled out a jar of mayonnaise, which he emptied onto my carpet.

I remained speechless.

"What's more," he said, grinding the mayonnaise in with his unearthly foot, "your most recent efforts show little sign of improvement. Take the case of your man with his too-small pants. There's no mystery there. He just got fat, that's all."

I cringed. He'd anticipated my big reveal. He wasn't considered a genius for nothing. Shaking my head in disbelief, I finally spoke. "You came back from the afterlife just to heckle me? Don't you have better things to do?"

He scoffed. "Well, unlike most people, *I* made the most of my time on the earthly sphere. For instance, have you heard of calculus? I invented that. Me. Calculus. Amongst other things."

That wiggled fuck! “Oh yeah?” I said. “Well, have you ever heard of a guy named Einstein? We don’t even live in a Newtonian world anymore, you asexual has-been.”

Newton slammed the refrigerator. “I hate it when people say that! My physics still serve as an extremely precise approximation. They got you to the moon, didn’t they? Anyway, I was working in the 18th century—let’s see how well you do with a quill and some sheepskin to do your calculations with.”

I shook my head. “What a copout.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“You act like that’s some kind of disadvantage.”

“It was,” he protested. “We didn’t even have erasers. If you made a mistake, you had to go kill another sheep.”

I scoffed. “I can only dream of that kind of peace and quiet. Do you know how much work I’d get done? You had everything going for you—no tv, no Internet, no movies, no magazines, no Xbox, no GameCube, no music, no porno, nothing. All that you had to do for fun was work. Hell, you even had the plague to keep you from going outside!”

“Well, uh, eh, it wasn’t quite as easy as that.”

“I bet you didn’t even have to do your laundry! You probably had servants. Anyway,” I shouted, on a roll now, “why are you heckling me? I’m not even a physicist.” I plopped down on my futon and sprawled back, hands linked behind my head. “CalTech’s just down the block—why don’t you go bother them?”

Newton pouted in front of the fridge. “Why don’t *you* go bother them?”

“That’s really mature,” I said. “You’re definitely living up to the reputation.”

“I’ll show you!” he shouted. “This haunting isn’t over yet! Tomorrow I’ll be back, and I’ll have dedicated my entire genius towards making you feel like the waste you are.”

“Eh,” I said, and turned on the television. He disappeared in a puff of brimstone.

The next morning, despite my best efforts to keep cool, I was a little worried. Einstein or not, Newton was a genius. I considered leaving my apartment, maybe trying to spend the night at a friend’s, but *Charmed* was on, and no one I knew had cable, so I decided to make my stand.

What I needed was a plan. This in mind, I set to my morning’s avoidance of writing with an energy I hadn’t had for months.

Newton had the potential of being even better for procrastinating than the time my apartment was broken into. Energized, I sat at the table and came up with list after list of things to do. I was getting something done. I was *planning*.

Sitting at the table I wrote a couple notes, then took a break to read the paper. A quick email check later I was hungry, so I had a bowl of cereal. Since I have to read when I eat, and I’d already finished the paper, I dug out one of the closet *New Yorkers* and got really into an article on pistachios. After I wrapped that up and checked a couple more websites online for more information, I took down a couple more notes on Newton, after which I realized it was dark outside, since I’d gotten up at three.

Reviewing my notes, I realized I wasn’t going to have enough time to whip up a homemade GhostBusters Trap, much less a containment unit, so I decided to go with Plan B. I headed to the local Ralphs and came back soon afterwards with the necessary supplies, two forty ounces of Olde English, which I downed while falling under the gentle spell of Alyssa Milano.

When I finally awoke the next morning, my apartment was ransacked. Cookie crumbs and Cheetos dust littered the floor, the smoke detector lay in sad pieces at my feet, and the crotch of my pants, I realized with some discomfort, seemed moist. Raising myself from my spot on the floor, I held my head with one hand and rubbed the slick of drool from my mouth with the other. It was going to be a long one.

“Oh, look who’s finally awake,” a familiar voice said behind me. I turned, and Newton was sitting at my table, drumming his fingers on its top. Next to him sat a thin, foppish man with a brown, curly wig. “And just when I was having such a good time sitting and waiting”

“Ugh,” I mumbled. “What did you do to my apartment?”

“Me? I’ll have you know your apartment was like this when we got here.”

“Oh.” I stood and tried to discreetly brush the front of my pants with my hand. Definitely moist. One bottle would’ve probably done the trick.

“Looking at what you’ve done to the place,” he said, “I’m beginning to wonder if you might be more damned left to your own devices.”

“Sounds good to me,” I said, shuffling to the sink for a glass of water.

“I was being facetious,” he replied. “The damning is still on, and I have its instrument right here next to me. Voltaire! The greatest writer of our age! He’s here to belittle your work.”

Voltaire half-shrugged in the chair next to him. He must have owed Newton a favor.

“Huh.” I downed my glass of water, then filled it for a second go.

Haunted indeed. Good job genius.

“Well, go on,” Newton said to Voltaire.

“All right, all right,” he replied reluctantly. “Well,” he said, “let’s start with the basics—what kind of work do you do?”

“Humor,” I said. “Stories, skits, that sort of thing.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. It’s no *Candide*, but I do my best.”

Voltaire blushed. “Oh, well, I’m glad to hear you’ve still heard of it.” Newton fixed him with a dirty look. “Right. Well, what sort of topics do you cover in your writing?”

I shrugged. “Sex jokes. Poop.” Newton affected a disgusted look.

“So it’s mainly for your private amusement then?” Voltaire asked.

“No,” I said. “It all gets published on the Internet. Anyone who wants to can read it.”

He looked shocked. “But what about the censors?”

Newton pounded his fist on the table. “My good man,” he shouted, “remember what you’re here for!”

Voltaire nodded. “Yes, yes, you’re terrible, not a shred of talent,” he directed to me. “But what about the censors?”

“There aren’t any.”

His eyes widened. “No censors?” He looked towards the dour ghost next to him. “You hear that Newton? No censors! A man could do anything he wanted.”

“I’m leaving,” Newton announced, and floated spectrally out of the room.

A few second passed in awkward silence. I walked to the hallway door and opened it hesitantly, then scanned the hallway in both directions. Looking back at Voltaire, I shrugged my shoulders and came back to the table.

“What a toff,” Voltaire muttered. “So, tell me about your next project.”

Eighteen months later I was living in Malibu, my move funded by the signing deal from my screenplay, *Boobs: The Movie*. Newton never returned to bother me, but I’m happy to report that my unnamed partner was happy to spend the next few years elaborating upon the inner workings of the human anatomy, particularly blondes, as I sat back and cashed the checks.