

Stamford Attic

It was definitely a horse sound. Maybe a bovine sneeze, but I heard boogers flying, slopping the other side of the ceiling. Wait? What?

This cannot be a dream. Am I being haunted? I don't live in an apartment; so no upstairs neighbors dropping spoons. But, there is an attic.

I have never been in the attic. Why would I? There's nothing to store up there, like Harry-the-Homeowners love to do. Everything I own is present to sit a butt on, or wear. I don't collect chairs for another day or guests. Piles of clothes in bins do not come back in style. Well, hopefully parachute pants. But, it's just me and 2 pairs of jeans in a colonial.

The house was built in 1902 for an original Rough Rider, a historian said. The military equestrian needed a Connecticut getaway before Connecticut getaways were fashionable, and probably tax efficient. Connecticut may not have even been a state then. It was probably still New England County.

The realtor concurred promulgating that John Campbell Greenway, himself, lived in the house and Teddy Roosevelt, himself, who else would it be, came to visit when the front door first opened. She said the Trust Buster sat on the front porch reveling over the battle of San Juan Hill, Cuba. It must have been before the City of San Juan moved to Puerto Rico and left the hill behind.

But the realtor quoted the President, "You're gonna die in this house John Campbell Greenway and haunt whoever lives here."

I would have appreciated that information before the signing. I did not want anyone from Harvard relaxing in my new home. I would have preferred New Haven's Rough Rider Edward C. Hall because he went to Yale with the finest growing ivy.

It has to be him in the attic. Only one from the Cowboy Regiment could make this kind of racket. He probably has his horse, too, feeding on the spiders. It must be.

But why now? Today of all days, making noise in the attic while I'm in bed.

I vaguely remember the Rough Riders. It's not the 100th anniversary; that was 1998 when the house was owned by a doctor who struck it rich in the dotcom era and moved to Iowa to build a baseball field in corn for ghosts, I think.

It's 2025 and the Chinese New Year of the Snake. I thank the stars I'm seeing that it's not a snake and I know because snakes don't have feet, or are so small I can't fathom how they would make this clop, clop of a sound.

There it is again. It's dressage. That word flows as scarily as the noise. I would follow it around if I could move from underneath the blanket. I can't.

I don't know if John Campbell Greenway was an expert rider but I would think yes if he could race uphill dodging arrows. I'm not certain if it's true, but, it's said the Cubans burned their tobacco during the war to get the soldiers hooked and it's what started the fad. A certain pyrrhic victory for all.

It has to be him haunting. Why couldn't the Rough Riders have lasted longer than 4 months, 13 days, 9 hours and 16 minutes so maybe John Campbell Greenway builds another home, maybe in East Egg, to haunt, and this house could have been owned by Jackie Robinson or Homer Stille Cummings, but not in that order.

I would love for Jackie Robinson to haunt my attic. There has to be 90 feet up there. He could steal bases and I would cheer from down here as if I was listening to the radio, had I been born before my parents and owned a radio.

Even Homer Stille Cummings would be better. He was a good Stamford mayor and knew Woody Wilson. Number twenty eight would be a respectable presidential visit; Princeton graduate and Connecticut Wesleyan professor. I could listen to Attorney General Cummings talking politics repeating what I hear on the TV today, "It's all France's fault."

If it was France up there I wouldn't be so mad because they take so many holidays it would be quiet. Marquis de Lafayette would be an exceptional house haunter and he visited Connecticut. Hamilton on Broadway was a must see and I must saw it. But, I cheated and went to the Bushnell.

John Campbell Greenway would not have his own Broadway musical, but it doesn't matter because he is creaking toward the ladder, but for what? I'm out of K Cups. It's not my fault. It's Costco's.

Maybe his horse is hungry. I don't have any hay. I don't even mow my own lawn. I can't remember if I have a lawn.

Why is John Campbell Greenway making so much noise? Maybe he is mad he never made the bicentennial celebration in New Haven. Maybe he was stuck on line at Frank Pepe's pizza. I'm so scared I'm confusing my dates, and I don't know what bicentennial means. Is it twice a year or twice every hundred years? He should have gone next door to Louie's, birth place of America's hamburger sandwich.

Maybe if I paid greater attention in Professor Plum's UConn history class I'd be better. I think it was Pickering and it was English. Now I'm afraid my ignorance is catching up to me while this man on a hoofed beast bears down. It's so loud, even with a deeper dive into my \$20 comforter protected by a \$500 duvet cover. I get so scared taking it to the dry cleaners. The \$50 cleaning is worth it. I'm afraid I have digressed.

The clapping is pounding. There's a *yeehaw*. It was loud but unnecessary because I know a *yeehaw* when I hear one. Kinda like everyone knew Bobby Valentine could play shortstop. The noise is so loud it could be Tommy Lasorda chasing after Pedro Martinez. It reminds me how much better it would be if it was Jackie Robinson.

I would invite my dad over. He could talk about visiting the Polo Grounds and the Shot Heard 'Round the World'. Mr. Robinson has to be over it by now.

It's not Jackie. It must be John Campbell Greenway.

It's getting faster. It was a prance, now gallop. Is he coming through the ceiling? Can horses jump straight up and down like over a double dutch rope? I've never seen it and I've watched a lot of reels. It's making my head spin.

Or, will he go out the roof, down and smash through the front door like William Wallace? But then he'll have to go up the stairs where I left so many pieces of clothing and luggage from my Final Four trip to see the University of Connecticut Huskies win a national Championship in Phoenix, Arizona. He'll be even more mad. He should actually bring something up with him because that's the rule and he probably just broke my front door and a good locksmith is impossible to find. And then the smith-of-locks has the keys to my house and I couldn't sleep before because my stomach hurts and this is making it worse.

It's happening. He's on the roof like Kris Kringle with a K because the big C is saved for someone else; Chris Christofferson. He must have jumped from the roof to the patio. I hear the four squares of slate at \$26 a piece crack. I should have put my comforter down to protect it, but he didn't tell me he was haunting today.

He's at the front door. It's him, not Amazon Prime and the duck back up noise. John Campbell Greenway is ringing my doorbell. I shouldn't answer the tolling bell because it's for me. Like the saying goes, "Be careful what you wish for." Remember Aladdin. Or, the Alamo. Remember that Ernest Hemingway lived nearby, in Westport. Maybe he's ringing his bell. It's only 12.7 miles away. I wish I was there. I would explain that if the Old Man put the fish inside the boat, it would have worked out. Now I'm back in Cuba plagiarizing Pickering.

I have to go. The bell won't stop. How can John Campbell Greenway ring a bell anyway? If he can do that and ride a horse he certainly can push down the attic stairs. That horse better not be eating my mums at the door. It's why I don't have K Cups. I spent all my money on flowers at Costco.

Why won't he stop that noise? Why can't I get down the stairs? When did I eat cookies on the 4th one down? Why is the bell getting louder? Why does it sound like the Von Traps are in the yard singing? I can see a doe, a deer through the window. Now I'm singing. No I'm not. Oh how I miss Jackie Robinson. I always thought the Commodore's song was about him. I shouldn't be scared. Jackie had been through so much more before settling in Stamford.

There is a glass of milk on the 5th step. Was it Christmas and Santa left it behind? He is supposed to drink it. That explains the cookies. But not the bag of pepperoni. The doorbell is louder than the bell that was too heavy making the Tower of Pisa lean to one side. The Hunchback and centripetal force created one of the dumbest tourist attractions; almost as bad as Wild Bill's Nostalgia Store in Middletown, CT. I went to college with Wild Bill's son. Not many cents in that boy's register.

John Campbell Greenway's finger must be Crazy Glued to the bell. It's a lightning bolt in my brain. Suffering my fate cannot be worse than the noise and I will face my fears and open this door. May he strike me down while his horse eats my mums. If Jackie was here he would steal me away from this. I thought that witty, even in my pounding head.

"I'm opening the door!" I scream.

Really whisper because my throat is dry from fear. I find an umbrella to defend myself and yank open the door. John Campbell Greenway's is wearing a hat a limo driver might. There is a limousine in the driveway and a Gutter Guys truck and men walking all about singing something.

"I'm here to take you to the airport," John Campbell Greenway says.

"Where are you taking me?"

"The airport...."

This has to be because I never paid that train fare in Italy. Stupid tower. It accrued and accrued, choo, choo and now I'm being imported back.

"What if I say I won't go?"

"The trip is nonrefundable," John Campbell Greenway answers.

"Where's your horse?" I ask.

He waits for more words but it is so bright outside I can't see so I say something like *you're not refundable either* and close the door. I worry the horse has moved over to my hydrangeas.

There is a knock at the back door. John Campbell Greenway is fast.

It is a different man in a different hat, one that reads *Est. 1989*. I thought maybe it was the ghost of George Orwell at my back door making Pickering proud. It couldn't be Taylor Swift because Travis Kelce is in Seattle. How do I know that? I hate the Jets.

He knocks again and again and again. I'm not afraid of George Orwell in a Gutter Guys, Stamford t-shirt. He was probably more afraid because Eric Blair had never been to Connecticut and has been dead since 1950.

Ripping the door open provides the breeze my now over sweating body requires.

"Good morning sir, my name is George," the man in the *Est. 1989* hat says.

"I know."

"Sorry about all the early noise on the roof but the message said it was an emergency."

"What message?"

"The one you left on our Gutter Guys message machine at 1am," he replies. "Something about rain and the Rough Riders coming and the gutters need to be cleaned ASAP."

We watch the limousine driver pull out of the driveway and an Edible Arrangements van pull in but this one says *Est. 1999 in Connecticut*. I still don't know what "Est." stands for.

Time freezes as the driver steps out and slides open the side door grabbing a very large and beautiful bouquet of fruit. I wonder if I could protect it with my duvet cover but my stomach isn't prepared for it. The driver presents it to me as if I won an Emmy or an Oscar or whichever one has the best host.

"When did I order this?"

"Last night at 1:22am," the driver answers. "Thank you for the tip."

George hands me his work receipt and I wonder if I need to sell the duvet cover.

"It's extra for same day request," George offers.

I close the door in George's face. *Where is the horse*, I wonder. And *what did I do last night? Was I abducted?* I check for burns or needle jabs, none. My fear driven dry mouth needs water and I move to the kitchen. From the looks of it, I had been robbed but they left all the dishes out and made a mac and cheese mess.

"Who would do this?"

My phone rings from a blocked number so I wait for the voice mail. Could it be the robbers demanding a ransom to come back and clean up?

"Hey Justin," it transcribes. "Just making sure you're up for the golf tee time you booked us last night at Sterling Farms. That was some wedding."

"Did I get married?" I mumble. "I hate golf. My name isn't Justin."

I breathe deeply. Sean got married. Sean is my brother. Sean gave me Guinness. Sean owes me \$489 for Gutter Cleaning. And a limo. Wait, where was I taking a limo?

Oh, my email says I have plane tickets to Los Angeles; four of them in the names of my childhood imaginary friends. I always wanted to go on vacation with Betcha Doo. He was adventurous but he got cancer. How could I be so insensitive?

I vaguely remember wanting to be an actor. I remember a pyramid of Guinness pint glasses and a jig performance even though I only went to one Jimmy Locust Performing Arts Center free tap dance lesson to meet people my age. It's the "new" golf. I hate tap dancing more.

I'm really scared, even more than when I thought John Campbell Greenway was going to kill me.

No!

I proclaimed to follow my dreams and emailed the firm, "The bell tools for my employment."

I seriously wrote, "Tools".

I need to sell my duvet cover and probably need more mums if the horse is out there. I hope the robbers comeback and clean up because I'm going back to bed.

Man, Guinness is scary.

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