

Someone to Watch Over Me

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If there are Guardian Angels, who can't there be Personal Devils as well? Read the story of one man who faced his Personal Devil and won. Or did he? You'll have to decide.

Have you ever had the feeling someone was watching over you? Maybe not a Guardian Angel, and of course not really "someone" like a real person. Just something that occasionally makes the difference between bad luck and good; something that somehow gives you little nudges in one direction or another.

Who hasn't? So, I'm no different. Well, maybe just a little different. Because I know there are beings who watch over us. And not just Guardian Angels.

I know because I had one. I even gave him a name. I called him my Personal Devil. I believe we all have Personal Devils and Guardian Angels. The Guardian Angels don't pay too much attention to us; they only step in when things could go really wrong. However, some of our Personal Devils stay quite busy. I can't take credit for this idea; many, many years ago, some science-fiction author wrote about Personal Devils.

Let me give you an example of a Personal Devil at work. For twenty years when you come home from work you put your wallet down in the same place. If you are a woman, maybe you always hang your purse from the same doorknob. On the morning of a very important job interview, you discover your wallet or purse isn't where you always put it. You're late, you were going to take a cab, and you've got no other money in the house. This would never happen if you weren't in a hurry. Only this one time in twenty years. So, who do you think moved that wallet/purse? Right. Your very own Personal Devil.

Or say you had a job like mine. I was a Reference Librarian. I spent my days looking up answers to difficult questions. These weren't simple questions-not your run-of-the-mill, "What was Babe Ruth's batting average in his last year?" No, I was a specialist. They called me "Mr. Reference Librarian." I got questions like "What was Weatherly's state of mind when he wrote "The Holy City" (a song). Weatherly, in case you didn't know, was an English barrister who wrote hymns. I spent hours tracking down just the right source to answer such questions. Sometimes, after a long search, I would find someone had torn out just the few pages from the one book containing the information I needed.

When this would happen, I always found it difficult to believe a nonlibrarian (because no librarian would be a book mutilator), at some time had: a) the interest; b) the skill to locate; and c) the perversity to tear out, these particular pages. I never believed this was just coincidence. The Fifth Rule of Reference Work is "Coincidences Aren't." No, it's never a coincidence. It is one particular being who takes a direct interest in what I am doing. A being who, with just a mite of precognition, is able to foresee I will want that one article in the near future and nip down to steal it just to frustrate me.

The reason I became sure about this is that it made some sense out of the universe. I realized it could not be a simple matter of bad luck that out of a 21-volume set of *Encyclopedia Americana*,

the one volume missing from the shelf was always the one I needed. No, it had to be my Personal Devil at work.

I know, at this point, you're probably saying to yourself, "This guy is just a leetle bit paranoid." However, just for the sake of argument, suppose I'm right. Think of how many perplexing things would be explained by the existence of Personal Devils. If you're the average person, you've had your share of bad luck. Don't you hate those people who respond "Why not you?" when you ask "Why Me?" How much more comforting to believe there is a special being devoting his/her time exclusively to you, just looking for opportunities for aggravation. The highway patrol car -waiting the one time in your entire driving life you exceed the speed limit. The phone that stops ringing one second before you reach it after dashing out of the shower. The car that works perfectly when you finally take it to a mechanic after ignoring that pranning noise for so long. I could go on and on, but I think you get the point. Anyway, the reason I know this isn't just a theory is because of the Shifting Books. And the Blood.

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Doctor said I'd have to stop writing for a while. I guess I'm not ready to deal with the Blood yet. Doctor thought it would be good for me to write down the history of how all this happened, but now I'm not so sure. However, he says I can talk about the Shifting Books because that is just library talk and not too disturbing. I think it's disturbing though--maybe you will too.

You've probably never noticed, unless you're another librarian, but books on library shelves tend to work themselves slowly backwards on the shelf. They start out neatly lined up at the front when they're first re-shelved. Gradually, and at varying rates, the books begin to move slowly towards the back of the shelf. No one ever sees someone actually pushing books back. It mostly happens to books on the bottom row of shelving, but I've never seen anyone brushing against these shelves with their feet as one library researcher theorized. But somehow, in minute increments, some books shift backward.

The shifting wouldn't be so bad, but eventually individual books move far enough to disappear finally from view and lie, unnoticed, behind the others. This creates a real problem for the library users. What before was simply a problem of esthetics-wavy lines of books rather than neatly pleasing straight lines-becomes a major problem of lost books. No one using the library assumes a book is hidden behind others on the shelf. The natural conclusion is that someone else has checked out the book. I once estimated that up to 20% of any library's collection lies hidden behind the standing books on the shelves.

Check me out on this. The next time you're in your local library, take a look behind some shelves. Don't bother with the religion section, that stays pretty straight. However, check on the literature, business, or medical sections. I will be very surprised if you don't find books hiding behind the shelves. For now, accept the word of an expert. Books do shift; they do end up hidden behind other books.

Given my belief in a Personal Devil, perhaps it's not surprising that one day a revolutionary idea occurred to me. I realized that most people aren't constantly plagued by what they consider bad luck (which of course it isn't). Therefore, there must be certain portions of each day when Personal Devils are "unemployed." What does a Personal Devil do during this time? Maybe they spend time on aimless mischief like feeding glitches into computers, causing traffic jams, or, perhaps, shifting books on library shelves.

It was a very short step from this idea to realizing I might have hit upon a way to verify, not only to myself, but also to the world, the existence of Personal Devils. When your Personal Devil buzzes off to

prepare some nasty surprise for you, of course there is no way you can catch him at it because you haven't reached the point in time of knowing what the surprise is going to be. When my Personal Devil ripped out those pages I needed, he must have done it with enough forewarning to ensure I could never catch him. However, when a Personal Devil is working on general aggravating tasks, perhaps it is not trying to anticipate anyone in particular. So maybe, just maybe, it isn't so alert.

I now realize it was at this time in my thinking I started to go overboard. Doctor has helped me to understand this. Writing this journal has clarified my thoughts. Still, I think my experiment was justified.

I shouldn't have used the blade though, that was a mistake. Surely, I could have worked out a simpler trap. Something that would not have resulted in all that Blood.

Whoops! I guess I'm back to the Blood again. It was all over the stacks. Personal Devils shouldn't bleed like that; they aren't human, are they? I need to stop thinking about this now.

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Doctor says I've come this far and it's time for me to face the last. I'll start by telling you about the trap I set. It was most ingenious. First, I thought about how the Personal Devil might go about shifting the books. I quickly realized it could never do it from plain view of the aisles. No, somehow it pulled the books back from behind the stacks. This meant the thing was capable of fitting behind and between the double-faced rows of shelves common to most libraries. From this hiding place, it could slowly, with infinite patience and when no one was looking, or better still, when the library was closed, shift a book here, a book there, until another worthy volume disappeared from use. If this was the way it worked, I could see a possible way to trap one-or at the least cause some injury.

People with a less brilliant turn of mind might have been totally at a loss in devising a trap for these incredibly crafty beasts. However, a few minutes thought revealed how I could make a perfect trap. Granted, the spark of the idea came from a magic show on television the previous week. Still, the essence of true genius is a highly developed ability to organize disparate facts into a coherent whole.

My only problem turned out to be the unexpected difficulty in finding a guillotine. I soon learned those used by magicians were so altered to ensure safety that they just would not serve my purpose. In the end I was forced to literally "do-it-myself." I bought a 3x4 piece of thin steel sheeting. I had a machine shop cut one of the shorter sides on a 30-degree angle. At home, I bolted a framework of 2 x 4s to the short straight side and part way down on the longer sides to give my "Personal Devil Slicer" weight and rigidity. With a file and then with a honing stone, I sharpened the diagonal edge of metal.

Now that I had a strong, rigid cutting plane, I spent weeks at home experimenting on the back of my own bookshelves to devise a method for attaching the trap and rigging a trigger. I finally settled on some C-shaped steel uprights, which had come with my shelving but hadn't been used. These rails held my guillotine and let it drop in a straight track. The framework could easily be attached with U-bolts to the uprights at the back of the shelving. In the library, the second set of shelving, which faced the next aisle, would hide the mounting.

The trigger was simplicity itself. A simple dowel stuck through a hole in the side rail supported the guillotine blade. Piano wire ran from this dowel through a ring, down to the bottom shelf, and across

the shelf at the back and was fastened to the other side. When a book moved far enough back to fall behind the rest, its weight would pull the bottom line, which in turn would "pull the plug."

I know what you're probably thinking. There was a basic flaw in my plan. Wouldn't the Personal Devil notice the trap? I gave a passing thought at the time to this, but I felt convinced of the single-minded nature of a Personal Devil when engaged on an errand of harassment. I just had to hope it wouldn't notice the blade waiting above or the very fine wire that was practically invisible. I banished the worry and proceeded.

I had to proceed because my own Personal Devil had been particularly busy while I was preparing the trap. If I tried to list all of the nasty things that were happening to me, you would think I was exaggerating- or even worse-crazy. The reality is this continual annoyance was blocking my best efforts at work and in my personal life. Even my fellow librarians were looking at me a bit oddly.

I had a key to the library, so it was no trouble to return one night after closing and set the trap. I had given a lot of thought to what section of books to use-even spending a month in a research project measuring the rate at which books were shifting in different areas of the library. (Colleagues in the library were most unhelpful during this period.) Since maximum shifting seemed to be occurring in the section with the Dewey Decimal number of 001.9, it was at this area I decided to locate my trap.

I set it up and then hid behind the reference desk where I could keep an eye on that section of books. It was about 3:00 A.M. when I heard a rustling sound from the trap area-and then all was quiet again. Finally, my impatience and curiosity got the better of me. Sure enough, *The Roswell Incident*, by Charles Berlitz, already recessed from the front of the shelf, was no longer in sight. So why hadn't the blade fallen? I felt towards the back of the shelf very carefully to see if the wire was loose. It was not. At least it wasn't when I first touched it.

Much of what happened in the next few months is still hazy. The good news was my Personal Devil disappeared. The bad news being confined in this place with a bunch of real crazies after I got out of the hospital.

However, Doctor says I'm making great progress and will soon be able to leave. I can't wait to get out. I have a new mission. I got rid of my Personal Devil. Now I need my revenge.

As soon as I get out of here and get a knife, I am going after my Guardian Angel who let me down. It may be a little difficult because I'm still kind of awkward using the Hook, but I am confident I will figure out a way.