

# SHELL SHOCKED

## *The Genie and the Gecko*

By Art Stevens

I ran into Gary the Gecko the other day. He was crawling under a lounge chair in my backyard searching for insects or whatever it is that geckos search for.

“Gary,” I said. “All you need to do is ask. If you’re looking for delicious insects to munch on just let me know. You know I always have an extra quart of gourmet insects in the freezer at the ready for you and your kids. Bailey’s carries them for me in its exotic delicacies food section. You don’t have to go slinking around. Besides, you know how my wife feels about crawly things like you.”

“Hi, Art,” he said. “How about just saying hello and not criticizing my lunch time food preferences? With all due respect I take satisfaction in hunting for my own food from time to time. And you needn’t take that tone of voice with me. Are you forgetting how I saved your life?”

He was right, of course. To be honest, it’s always been embarrassing to me to admit that a tiny gecko did indeed save my life. I always made sure that I had at least a couple of glasses of wine before I told this story. Who would believe it anyway?

I don’t know when it started but I was already living in Sanibel and acquainting myself with local wildlife. We didn’t have geckos roaming around where I came from so when I first saw these tiny little lizards I kind of grew attached to them. My wife thought it was curious that of all the wildlife that Sanibel had to offer I would become attached to geckos.

Every time I saw one I would name him and start an imaginary conversation with it. “Hi, Larry. How are you today? Are you having a good day? Are you sunning yourself on the pool cage? Ha, ha, ha.”

Or, “Hi, Lizzy, where’s Larry today? Out hunting for buffalos? Ha, ha, ha.”

My wife would give me one of those looks but I continued my one-way conversations with geckos. And then the day came when the wine bottle washed up on shore. Naturally, I picked it up wondering if Fidel Castro had thrown it into the other end of the Gulf of Mexico in a fit of pique after realizing he was drinking putrid Russian wine. When I picked it up I noticed that smoke came out of it followed by a big round green genie. Naturally, he had a Russian accent.

My word. A genie in Sanibel. What else could happen here – a Britney Spears sighting? The genie asked me the usual questions – three wishes, blah, blah, blah. I was blasé about the whole experience. I’d read so many stories about genies granting their captors three wishes that I half expected that to have already happened to me years earlier. In fact I thought I had run into an obliging genie once in Hawaii but it turned out to be a local witch doctor instead.

So I told the genie that my first wish was to undo the Red Sox play off victory over the Yankees three years ago and have the Yankees win the World Series. I think the genie was hard of hearing. Maybe his ears got clogged up having spent all those years floating in the Gulf of Mexico.

He must have thought I said Giants and not Yankees and lo and behold the Giants won the Super Bowl against another New England team. I told him that he needed to listen better because as much as I liked seeing the Giants beat the Patriots I was more of a Yankee fan than a Giant fan.

He apologized and promised to listen more carefully. I told him my next wish. "I want to live my life on the get go." So he turned me into a gecko. God almighty, was this genie too proud to wear a hearing aid?

The next thing I know I'm crawling around my back yard looking for insects. That's one hell of a come down from caviar. And just as I was about to capture an unsuspecting ant an enormous egret pounced on me. He was about to eat me when Gary the Gecko happened to be crawling by. He quickly sized up the situation and thought fast. He yelled to the egret, "Hey, you. You've got the skinniest legs I've ever seen on a bird. You're not an egret. You're an ugly duckling."

Whereupon the egret dropped me from his beak and looked at his reflection in a side window. He looked down at his legs and as he was studying them with tears rolling down his face Gary quickly whisked me to safety.

"You're not one of us," Gary said. "Geckos don't drink wine or read Yankee box scores in the newspaper. I'd better find that genie for you." We looked high and wide and finally found the genie at Doc Ford's trying to pick up one of the waitresses. He was trying to pull his three wishes number on a savvy waitress and she told him to scram. "Genie," Gary said. "You've made a mistake here. He doesn't want to be a gecko. You need to grant him his final wish."

I was tempted to use the final wish for something daring, like Bush resigning in mid term. But I decided to simply ask the genie to restore my former life.

"Did you say wife?" "No, Genie, I said my life, not my wife". He got it right this time. He turned me back into me. The only lingering side effect was that I was now able to carry on conversations with geckos, like Gary.

Yes, it's true that Gary saved my life. But how many quarts of gourmet insects do I constantly have to keep in my freezer to continue to repay that debt?

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