

A CONSCIENCE IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE

written by

Scott Nelson

1735 Woods Way  
Lake Geneva, WI 53147  
262 290 6957  
scottn7@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. PETER'S EATING AREA - NIGHT

PETER sits at the table with his wife, JENNIFER. He is a tall, white man, powerfully built, early thirties. She is medium build, mid thirties. She is white, pretty, but over made up and trying just a bit too hard.

The home is nice. Upper middle class, but unremarkable and easily forgettable.

JENNIFER

So that's it? No money?

PETER

Well, not yet. But he says that we will get our money if we do some silly instructions that has sent to us.

JENNIFER

A hundred million dollars?

PETER

That's what he said.

JENNIFER

I don't know about you, but I'll do whatever it says for that money. No limits. I know my price.

PETER

Well, don't be so quick. You don't know my father.

She gets up to get some coffee.

JENNIFER

What could he possibly want you to do?

PETER

I don't know. I'm sure he will run me to kingdom come and back again. Just got to wait and see.

The doorbell RINGS. The two look at each other, excited. Peter jumps up and goes to the door.

Opening the door, he sees a DELIVERY MAN.

DELIVERY MAN  
Package for a Peter Andrews.

He hands him an electronic signature device. Peter signs and hands it back. The man gives him a box, not terribly large.

DELIVERY MAN (CONT'D)  
Here you go. Have a good evening.

Peter takes the box and closes the door almost before the delivery man finishes his sentence.

JENNIFER  
Is that it?

PETER  
Looks like it. No return address  
but I bet it is.

He takes it back to the kitchen and grabs a box cutter out of the drawer.

As he opens it, Jennifer tries to see past him.

JENNIFER  
Well?

Peter removes a letter, and a small device. It looks like a watch but has only one button on it, in the middle.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)  
What is it?

PETER  
I have no idea.

He sits down and takes out the letter.

PETER (CONT'D)  
(reading)  
"Your challenge is an easy one. Put the attached device on and push the button. Doing so will guarantee you your share of the money. But there is a catch. After you push the button, someone will die because of it. It may be a friend, or family member. It may be a stranger, but someone will die. The button will glow until the death occurs. At anytime, you may press the button again to stop it. But doing so will forfeit your money. Once the glow is gone, the death has occurred.  
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

And you cannot remove the device until the glow has gone out. Good luck."

Peter laughs a little.

PETER (CONT'D)

That's it? Well, easiest money I have ever made.

He puts the watch on, looks at it, and gets ready to push the button.

JENNIFER

What are you doing?

PETER

Pushing the button. What do you think I'm doing?

JENNIFER

Wait. You can't do that.

PETER

Why? Because of his silly mumbo jumbo? Pushing this won't make anyone die. He doesn't have power like that. He's just trying to scare me. Besides, you said you would do anything for the money.

JENNIFER

But what if it's real?

PETER

Real? Are you out of your mind? This is a silly game, a premise. Nothing more. In fact, I saw this once in a textbook. It's a story idea to help with writer's block. Pathetic really.

JENNIFER

You said your dad was really into the occult, right?

PETER

Yeah, so?

JENNIFER

Well...

PETER

Oh, come on. That's all fake stuff. Ouija boards and silly superstitions. This makes about as much sense as sticking pins in dolls.

The two look at the watch, then each other.

PETER (CONT'D)

Enough talk.

He pushes the button. It begins to glow.

PETER (CONT'D)

There. We are now worth at least one hundred million dollars. Maybe more. Although if my siblings didn't get anything harder than this they all will be getting their money.

Jennifer looks apprehensive.

JENNIFER

I don't like this. Not at all.

She paces away, concerned.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

The letter said it might be a stranger. But it also said it could be family. What if it's me? What if you just killed me?

He walks over to console her.

PETER

Honey. You're freaking out over nothing. Nothing is going to happen to you. Or anyone. I promise you.

He looks at the glowing watch.

PETER (CONT'D)

Biggest problem is how I'm going to sleep with this on. It's going to be quite the night light.

Jennifer gets mad.

JENNIFER

Peter! This is not a joke. I think there's something to this.

(MORE)

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

We just decided to kill someone so we can have a lot of money. I'm not comfortable with that.

PETER

A hundred million will buy a lot of therapy.

JENNIFER

That's not funny.

PETER

I don't know. Maybe a little funny?

She scowls at him

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Peter lays in bed. Jennifer is already asleep next to him. As he lays there, he looks at the device, glowing, on his wrist. He stares at it for some time.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Peter sits in his office. It is a nice, rather large office showing that Peter is somewhat successful. A single picture of Jennifer sits on the desk.

HECTOR pokes his head in. He is a stocky Hispanic man, around Peter's age.

HECTOR

You got lunch plans?

PETER

No, nothing much. What'd you have in mind?

HECTOR

I was thinking that new chicken place on fifth that just opened up. Sound good?

PETER

Sounds great.

He turns to leave but notices the device glowing.

HECTOR  
That one of new fitness trackers?

Peter looks at it.

PETER  
This? Ahh... yeah, sure. A fitness tracker.

HECTOR  
That glow is annoying.

As he turns his cell phone rings.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Hello? Oh, hi honey. I was just talking to... what? What's wrong?...OK, I'll be right home. Don't panic.

He hangs up.

HECTOR (CONT'D)  
Got to take a raincheck.

PETER  
Everything OK?

HECTOR  
I don't know. That was Liz. She said she suddenly came down with something. Sounds bad. I better run home and check on her.

PETER  
Yeah... yeah... you do that. Hope she's OK.

As Hector leaves he looks at the device, and the glow, and thinks about this.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Peter sits alone in a neighborhood bar. The bar is only half full. Behind the bar the TV is on with a sporting even going.

Peter's phone rings.

PETER  
Hello?

INT. HECTOR'S HOME - NIGHT

HECTOR  
Pete? Hector here.

INTERCUT BETWEEN PETE AND HECTOR

PETER  
Hector. How's Liz?

HECTOR  
(holding back tears)  
Not good. Not good at all...

PETER  
What's wrong?

HECTOR  
I don't know. She's in the  
hospital.

PETER  
The hospital?

HECTOR  
Yeah. Doctors are running all sorts  
of tests, but they don't know.

PETER  
What happened?

HECTOR  
I don't know. She just collapsed.  
When I got home I found her out  
cold on the floor. I gotta tell  
you, I'm really scared.

Pete looks at the glowing device.

PETER  
I'm sure they will figure it out  
and she'll be fine.

HECTOR  
I hope so. I don't know what I'd  
do, if, you know, she...

PETER  
Don't go there. She'll be fine. You  
go sit with her. Let me know if  
there's any change.

HECTOR  
I will. Thanks for listening.



INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Peter hangs up, and once again looks at the device. He covers it with his hand and tries to ignore it by looking to the TV.

As he watches, a breaking news banner comes on. An ANCHORWOMAN comes on. She is white, very pretty, and very serious.

ANCHORWOMAN (ON TV)  
We have breaking news. A school bus carrying a high school girls baseball team has crashed on the East Parkway.

Images of a mangled bus appear. A distraught MOTHER is captured on screen.

MOTHER (ON TV)  
MY DAUGHTER'S IN THERE! HELP HER!

ANCHORWOMAN (ON TV)  
We don't have details yet, but police are saying that they expect casualties. We will update you with news as it becomes available.

The game comes back. Peter looks again at the device, still glowing, but growing slightly fainter. He shakes his head.

PETER  
Not my problem. It's really not my problem.

But even he doesn't fully believe that.

He signals to the bartender, MELISSA to bring him another drink. She walks over. Black, in her mid twenties, dark hair, very pretty. She flirts just a little as she talks to him.

MELISSA  
You look like you're having a rough night.

PETER  
That obvious?

He thinks for a moment.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Can I ask you something...

MELISSA  
Melissa.

PETER

Melissa. Can I ask you something,  
Melissa?

MELISSA

Sure, I guess so.

PETER

You ever think about metaphysical  
problems?

MELISSA

Meta... what?

PETER

Metaphysical. Like if a tree falls  
in the woods... that kind of stuff.

MELISSA

Oh, sure. I actually love those  
sort of thought puzzles. Whatta ya  
got?

PETER

OK. Let's say that I stood to  
inherit a lot of money.

MELISSA

How much?

PETER

A lot.

MELISSA

I'd say I get off at ten.

PETER

No, no. This isn't a pick up line.

MELISSA

Damn. I was liking it. Anyway, go  
on. So you are going to inherit  
this money.

PETER

Right. But to do so, I have to kill  
someone.

MELISSA

Would you get caught?

PETER

Hope. Wouldn't even know who it  
was.

MELISSA

Wait a minute. How can you kill someone without knowing who it is?

PETER

Let's just say I do something to cause it to happen. No one I know. No effect on me. Would you do it?

MELISSA

In a heartbeat.

PETER

Really?

MELISSA

Sure. Listen, people die every day. And when they do, I get nothing out of it. Why should that be? Why not give me something that could change my life, in exchange for someone dying that is probably going to die soon anyway? I don't see a problem.

PETER

But you would be responsible.

MELISSA

Would I? Did I pull the trigger? Did I push them off a bridge? I just serve as the instrument of justice as it were. I don't have a problem with it.

Peter leans back to ponder this.

PETER

That is a real interesting take. And not at all what I expected.

MELISSA

You wanted me to side with you, didn't you? Tell you to tell the guy giving you the money to go fuck himself. Nope. Not going to do it. Grab the brass ring, for once in your life. Look out for number one.

PETER

That's cold.

MELISSA

Life is cold my friend. Very, very cold.

He gives a pained smile.

PETER

I've always thought so. Said it  
myself a time or two. Not so sure  
now.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

It's raining, but Peter doesn't care. He lets the rain fall  
on him as he walks along.

He comes to a church, and sees a hearse parked in front.  
Thinking for a moment, he goes inside.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Peter slips in the back and finds a pew. In the front, a  
casket is on display. Mourners pass by, many cry. One  
MOURNER, a woman, breaks down in front of the casket, wailing  
uncontrollable as her friends try to help her.

Peter hangs his head. He looks at the device on his wrist,  
which has gotten noticeably dimmer.

INT. PETER'S EATING AREA - NIGHT

Peter and Jennifer sit at the table, talking.

JENNIFER

You're sure?

Peter nods.

PETER

I don't see how I can do anything  
else.

JENNIFER

Well, it's your choice. You're the  
one who has to live with it.

He looks at the device, which is almost out.

PETER

Sitting at that church today,  
watching the funeral. I saw the  
effect that death has on those left  
behind. I can't cause someone,  
anyone, to go through that.

JENNIFER

I understand. But you realize that if you push that button again, we will stay poor.

He continues to stare at the device.

PETER

I know. But I don't see that I have any choice. What good is the money going to do me if I can't live with myself?

His hand hovers over the device. It is almost out.

He hesitates, then carefully pushes it. There is a CLICK and the whole device goes dark.

PETER (CONT'D)

It's done.

She comes over and kisses him on the forehead.

JENNIFER

It is. I'm proud of you.

PETER

Are you? Really?

JENNIFER

Yep. You did the right thing. You thought of others over yourself.

She starts to walk off, then turns.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

You know, that might have been what your dad wanted all along.

PETER

Yeah, maybe. I still wonder something though.

JENNIFER

What?

PETER

If it was all real? I mean, would I really have killed someone? Or was it all a big mind game?

JENNIFER

Who knows? But does it really matter one way or the other?

PETER

Maybe not. I wonder though.

He heads for the door.

JENNIFER

Where are you going?

PETER

I need a smoke.

JENNIFER

You don't smoke.

PETER

I do now.

FADE OUT.

THE END