

What The Hell Was I Thinking

Brad Hufford

I dappled more bubble bath into the tub, and eased back into the slick folds of the rising foam. Hot water gushed from the faucet and spattered into steam and suds. I sighed. If nothing else, I thought dully, there's always the bathtub to turn to.

"Hi, honey." My wife suddenly emerged through the humid mist of the bathroom, cradling an already-wilting grocery bag in each arm. "Trying the tub again, huh." I nodded. "Do you want the TV?" She saw by the irritated look crawling across my face that she had once again voiced an incredibly retarded question. "I'll go get it." Steam clouds whirled in her wake.

I lathered angrily. Women. Who else can remember every word you mushily muttered to them in code over a staticky ham radio ten years ago, but can't remember that the oat loaf they try to pass off as a new recipe every week turns the whole inside of your mouth brown?

"Well, its about time," I snapped when she finally returned. Timidly she slid the plug into the socket and clicked the switch to "on." The television buzzed quietly in her arms. "You don't mind, do you?" she offered cautiously.

"Yes."

"Please? Last time you said I could."

"Forget it." I wagged a soapy finger at her. "You'll get hurt like you did last time. Just go away." And with that, I lunged at the TV, tore it from her fingers, plopped it defiantly into the tub, and sat on it.

I felt the current scramble from the set, pop and hiss through the water, climb searingly across the hair of my feet and legs. Phil Donahue gurgled as I sat on him. I heard him bubble incoherently (which wasn't too unusual) as my body shuddered with raw power... Wavering blue bolts rippled up the dampness of my body, stabbing viciously, unforgivingly...

With a loud —crack!— my black and white perch exploded and I felt the instant

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relief of a 10,000 volt glass and plastic suppository. When the smoke dissipated, I was more than a little upset at the cruelty of a world that could spare your life, but would take away your television and secondary sex hair.

"For cryin' out loud, of all the rotten..." my muttering trailed off abruptly as I saw my wife draped over the edge of the tub's far end. Smoke lingered throughout her ebony hair, which used to be blonde. Hurriedly, I rushed to her side and, gingerly, jerked her head up by the scalp. After trying this several times, I realized that her hair was just going to keep ripping out, so I instead tried dragging her out by the ankles. I then propped her back up on the tub and did it again to see if her head would repeat that unusual gonging sound when it rebounded off the ceramic. It did.

When I rolled her over and took a look at what the shock had done to my beautiful wife, I began to feel the gnawing of remorse at my guts. Her bangs were now able to be covered with a Jewish beanie. It looked like she had been bobbing for teeth in a tar pit, because her lips pursed the last three of her molars, and her head looked like something a preschooler had found difficult staying in between the lines on while using up his black crayon. The remorse escalated as I wondered how much a funeral would bleed me.

Before I began worrying about it too much, I went and got a sandwich, and when I came back, I noticed she was kind of squirming around. I kneeled down beside her.

"Nice going, dummy," I whispered softly to her.

"Bleaaah," she replied.

"What did I tell you?" I could tell by the way her skin flaked off like soot that she wasn't feeling too well. "You never listen, and now your head looks like a briquet. How do you expect me to die if I have to keep worrying about you?" She gargled an apology at that, but began moaning when I asked her what was for dinner.

"Don't worry about it then," I soothed her, "We'll go out, then I'll take you to the burn ward."

I was unusually quiet on the drive to the hospital. As the buildings of my neighborhood slid past and dissolved into a distant mass behind me, I found my thoughts similarly jumbled in my weary memory. Thoughts going so far back in time it seemed they were fantasies rather than actual events—no longer did I find any fascination dwelling upon them,

or trying to unravel them from one another. Nothing, as a matter of fact, fascinated me anymore. Immortality does that—makes life riskless, unchallenging, making you curious about only two things. The things you never can grasp: pain, death.

Be that as it may, I was determined to try.

"Look, over there, honey," I pointed out the window at some frustrated ghetto children getting out their frustrations by hitting an old woman with a pipe. "Do you think...?" Not even shutting off the ignition, I leaped from the car and began waving my wallet at them, shrieking my desire to be mugged. I guess the sight of a hairless white man howling at the top of his lungs made the ghetto children a bit bashful, because they all fled screaming.

"Now where did they go?" I muttered, somewhat annoyed.

My inquiry was soon answered by a low grumbling sound. I whirled around, delighted to find that a ghetto child had taken the initiative to hop in my car and gun it right at me. Silt cascaded off my wife's face as she strained and screamed out the passenger window. I waved to her.

The car whined as the gears struggled to gather more speed for the impending impact. The fender crunched against me, flipping me up effortlessly against the windshield, over the top, dropping me with a jarring thud against the windshield, over the top, dropping me with a jarring thud against the gritty pavement.

When I got up, very disappointed and much too alive, I wandered over to my car. I resumed the driver's seat recently vacated by the ghetto child, and began trying to calm my wife down. It wasn't working, I realized, so I got out and walked over to the passenger side, where she was hanging limply out of a jagged hole in the window, thrown there when the driver rammed the car into the mailbox. Still unable to sooth her or stop her hemorrhaging, I got up on the hood and began yanking her out. Crap, I thought, she's stuck. Luckily, the glass began to snap and crackle away when I tried twisting her out.

That accomplished, I surmised that I wouldn't be driving much of anywhere in my car, since it was bent in the middle like a fat Bassett hound, and none of the tires could touch the ground. I glanced around. Aha! One of the ghetto children had left a little Radio Flyer wagon nearby, so I plopped my wife down into it and proceeded to take her to the hospital.

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About halfway there, when it was her turn to pull me in the wagon, I noticed there was a small chili vendor across from an appliance store.

"Stop!" I cried eagerly to my wife, who was reluctant. She pointed to the thick bodily fluid dribbling out of her ear, indicating that perhaps it would be a good idea to have that, and the deep lacerations that covered 80% of her body and frothed blood, checked out right away. Angry that she wanted to do what I wanted to do, I tripped her, and bought some chili.

All of a sudden, I began to feel very eerie, like there was something filmy scuttling over my soul. It immediately ballooned into a sensation that I could only describe as the rending of frenzied talons against the very fabric of my mind. All of my thoughts began to melt into a previously unknown realization of horror. I was barely able to spin around, so clouded was my vision and equilibrium.

Before my eyes found the rest they had been seeking so long to attain, they relayed to me what doom had gathered me up into its clutches...

Tom Cruise, faltering over every badly-delivered line, lapsed into one of his sickening smiles in an attempt to cover up his ineptitude at acting; next to him, Jon Bon Jovi crooned to some frantic seven-year-old girls who were the only ones who now could tolerate his overplayed, over-synthesized, tinkerbelle Top-40 caterwauling that took as much talent to create a turd; Vanna White stood there and did nothing, as usual...

My brain began to swish around in my skull as Death slowly gathered me in. As the world faded away, my last memory was of the televisions in the appliance store window, carelessly leaking poison... .