

## The Toothbrush Story

Emily was my girlfriend in college. She had long auburn hair, brightly saturated green eyes, and a pallid ivory-cream complexion. Under the right light it was easy to mistake her for an angel. She really was the most strikingly beautiful woman on earth. She was soft-spoken, calm, rational, emotionally collected, and practical. She had a career as a reasonably well known interior decorator and had begun to get commissions from international clients. Emily was very successful.

One morning at Emily's apartment, after failing at sex again, I woke up at five-thirty to the incessant sound of an electronic alarm. After hitting the snooze button three times, Emily got up and made a call to her office.

"Don't worry," she said. "No, I'm coming, I'll be there in fifteen minutes. I'm just running a little late."

She entered the bathroom and started to get ready for work. She was in a general good mood, despite my miserable failure, and sang to herself softly. The sound of water running in the sink muffled the loud humming of the heater as Emily's footsteps could be heard from the bathroom. The air was very dry.

Laying on the bed I felt dizzy and sick. Emily and I had just gone to bed two and a half hours prior, so I was tired, very tired. As I pulled the blankets up over my body and tried to fall back to sleep, I felt something damp just above my upper lip. I touched the spot under my right nostril, looked at my finger and realized it was blood. I had a bloody nose from the dry air.

This was not surprising because the queen-sized mattress in which I laid put its occupants right in front of a heating vent on the wall. It was one of those heaters that was either on or off, but when it was on it was *really on*. Since it was the dead of winter the heat was on and it was hot in the small apartment. The dry air was blowing in my face all night long.

Realizing that I now had to get up, to stop the bleeding from my nose, I clumsily arose and staggered towards the bathroom. I had a head-rush from getting up too quickly, I was dizzy from lack of sleep, and I felt

sick to my stomach from the exhaust. Blood continued to drip from my nose as I joined Emily in the bathroom and stood next to her in front of the mirror, where she was looking at herself critically, making a girl face. I looked at our reflection in the mirror. She was fully dressed wearing a white dress-shirt un-tucked, and navy-blue pants that fit her body snugly. I was shirtless, my scrawny body exposed like a turtle without a shell. I looked sickly, my skin pale, blood dripping from my nose.

“What happened to your nose?” Emily asked.

“It’s just bloody from the dry air,” I replied.

“Oh,” she acknowledged with an insincere voice.

Emily continued to get ready for work, standing next to me in front of the mirror as I swabbed at my bloody nose with a piece of toilet paper. First she washed her hands, afterwards her face. Then she took about three steps out of the bathroom. This is when my situation changed drastically and an epic battle for survival was unleashed upon me. Though the thoughts I will here outline might seem long and drawn out, the entire struggle was over in a matter of seconds. Despite the fact it was over quickly, it would alter my life for months. Anyhow, as I was saying, Emily was walking away from me in the other room but was still very close. Her back was turned to me and she could not see what was about to happen.

I swabbed at my nose weakly, my head dizzy from tiredness. Weary and dazed I struggled to stay on my feet as my body began to swagger. I could feel a tingly feeling swell in my brain as the world around me began to swirl. I was like a child on a merry-go-round. Around and around my head began to spin. Maybe it was low blood pressure, maybe it was not enough to eat the day before, or maybe it was just the exhaustion. Whatever it was, I felt as if I was going to faint. I did not faint, however. I simply stumbled forward towards the sink, did a dip, and caught myself before hitting the ground. My head had bounced off something in front of me and then I was standing upright again. Weakly, I tried to support myself on two legs.

But what was that? There was shock! I felt shock! Disoriented. Still dizzy. But what was that? Something was wrong. Pain. Confusion set in. Disorder, chaos, and unnerve. Shock. But what was that? What happened? What was going on? Sick. Pain. Disoriented. Unrest. Confusion. Something was wrong. Throbbing. Uncertainty. But what was that? What happened?

I looked in the mirror. My eyes grew wicked, the size of golf balls, when I saw what had happened. A long plastic shank was protruding from my nose! A plastic duct, a shaft, was protruding from my nose! It was a toothbrush! A toothbrush was lodged up my nose! When I fell, I did so in such a way as to land face-first into a cup-type toothbrush holder on the sink. You know the culprit. It’s one of those wicked little cups with a lid and

four holes where you put your toothbrush by the sink. Falling into it lodged a toothbrush, bristle side first, up my nose and into my head.

I was shocked. Immediately my entire body was gripped by fear and panic. There was a fucking toothbrush shoved up my nose! I didn't know what to do, I started shaking. But I had to get it out. Right? I had to get it out! I couldn't just leave it there! Immediately I began the inner struggle of mind over matter, right versus wrong, life and death. I had to get it out! I tried to steady myself...

I grabbed the plastic shaft of the toothbrush...

And pulled...

The toothbrush pulled my head forward like chunk of dead weight. As if I was pulling on my nose itself, like it was an extension of my body, it just pulled my head forward. The toothbrush didn't budge! There was a toothbrush shoved up my nose and when I pulled on it, it didn't move! It just pulled my head forward! Panic. Fear. Terror. I was going to die! Yes, I was going to die! There was a toothbrush shoved up my nose and it wouldn't come out! It didn't budge! I was surely going to die! Horror. But I had to get it out! Right? I had to! I tried to put the panic down. I had to be strong. I had to get it out! Panic. No. Panic. No. Ok. I was going to do it. Alright. Everything was going to be O.K. Panic. No. Alright. I had to get it out! There was a toothbrush shoved up my nose. I had to get it out. Having just tried to pull it out without success, I knew the second time I had to pull my hardest. I pulled once and it didn't moved. This time I would have to pull with all my strength. I steadied myself...

I grabbed the plastic shaft of the toothbrush...

And pulled a second time...This time I pulled my hardest...

The toothbrush pulled the dead weight of my head forward like a heavy lump of carrion, like something dead. This time it moved slightly, maybe a millimeter or two. I could feel it move when I pulled. It was that sword in stone texture, like pulling a sword from a stone, gritty. A jagged pain shot through the dead heavy feeling deep in the center of my head. It was like the feeling you get right before you sneeze, but with pain. The toothbrush moved a little but it didn't come out. It was still lodged inside my nose. It was still lodged inside my nose! I tried to pull it out twice! The second time my hardest! It didn't move. I was going to die! Panic. Terror. It was still lodged inside my head. I was sick. I was trembling with horror. Horrified, I was shaking. Fear. Twice I pulled! It was still lodged in my head! Fear. But I had to calm myself. I had to pull it out. I tried twice. It didn't come out. I would try again, a third time. I would pull my hardest, a third time. I had to get it out. Right? I steadied myself again...

I grabbed the toothbrush a third time...

And pulled my hardest...

Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion...The toothbrush shot out of my nose like a log from a breaking dam as my right arm moved away from my face with a swooping motion, brush clenched, arm extending, blood flowing from the brush like red paint. As if I was an abstract painter working on a masterpiece, the bathroom walls my canvas, I splattered blood across the room with the action on my release... This is when Emily turned around. All she saw was my arm pulling away from my face, brush clenched in hand, separating.

Blood. Blood shot out of my nose like a fountain, a great geyser. Blood. Blood on the floor. Blood on the walls. Blood in my hair. Blood on my skin, on my stomach, on my shoulders, on my arms. There was blood flowing from my nose like a great river. Blood. Blood in the sink. Blood on the mirror. Blood all over. It looked like a murder scene.

I made a whimpering sound as I slowly slumped to the floor. Throwing the toothbrush with my last bit of strength, I drifted downwards like a feather falling from the sky. The toothbrush made a splashing sound as it landed in the toilet.

“What the hell?” screamed Emily. “What! What happened? What!”

“Toothbrush,” I explained.

“What!”

“Toothbrush up my nose,” I said.

“What the hell are you talking about!”

Emily was hysterical, pacing back and forth screaming in terror. She was looking for an explanation, a reason, anything that would explain why I was slumped on the floor with blood flowing out of my face. She was looking for anything that would explain the blood on the walls, on the mirror, on the floor.

I couldn't talk. I pointed at the toilet.

“What!” she screamed.

“I'm hurt,” I said. Blood was still streaming from my nose. It wouldn't stop. I heard her talking to her office on the telephone for the second time that morning.

“No...I'm not coming in. No...I have to take my boyfriend to the emergency room. No...I don't know. I don't know what happened. You wouldn't believe me if I told you. I have to go...I'm going to the hospital.”

Together, we rushed out into the cold of winter, me clutching my nose with a wad of toilet paper the size

of a softball. It was still dark outside and the streets were full with a deep white powder. Maroon drips of blood contrasted against the white snow, making a trail of little droplets from the front door to the car. The driving conditions were hazardous.

At the hospital check-in I had a hard time getting people to take me seriously after I explained my situation. "Toothbrush in my nose," was all I could muster.

One of the greeters checked my eyes to see if I was on drugs. "Have you taken anything?" he asked. He was a tall dark-haired man dressed in the traditional soft green garb of the hospital. He shined a tiny light in my face.

The other greeter, looking much the same, seemed incredulous. "You came here for a bloody nose?" he said.

After some talking, when they saw that the bleeding wouldn't stop, I was able to convince them I needed assistance. And there I sat for hours. First came the house doctor. He had natural red hair and a mustache that could be seen when he lifted his white hospital mask. He was a busy man, attending to many patients in the emergency room. "There's not much we can do for you. You just have a bloody nose," he said.

I looked at him sternly and a look of pain grew across his face.

"Well...your circumstances do strike me as bizarre...to say the least. We *should* call the specialist just to be safe."

Two hours later the "nose and mouth" specialist arrived. He was the first person to show sympathy towards my problem. He had dark brown hair, wore glasses, and talked calmly.

"We've seen all types of strange things in people's noses," he said. "Don't worry. This *is* the first time I've heard of a...*toothbrush*...but...well...let's have a look."

After shining a little flashlight up my nose he immediately snapped into action. "This could be serious," he said. "It looks like the bristles tore it up pretty good in there. We'll have to give you stitches on the inside. Then you'll need to wear a pack."

Soon I was surrounded by the specialist, house doctor, and various nurses. The specialist came at me with a long, thin steel rod. On the end of it was a hook with thread tied to it. "I'm going to use this hook to pull the thread through, on the inside," he said. "Then I'll be able to tie little slipknots. Those are the stitches. It will feel a little weird but..."

With care he began. First a sting followed by the pulling of thread. I watched the knots form in front of my eye and then travel down the string disappearing out of sight, into my nose. It *did* feel strange, but it *looked*

even stranger. The procedure was over quickly.

“You’ll need a C.A.T scan,” the specialist said. “If the toothbrush went too far to the right, your sinuses could have been affected. If it went too far up it could have cracked your skull, allowing bacteria to enter your brain. The mouth is a dirty place. It’s the dirtiest place in your body. There are lots of germs. Germs on the toothbrush could cause a serious infection on your brain. It could kill you. Now...we don’t think that happened. You’re alert and there’s no pain there...but...we have to be sure.”

Soon a nurse came in to take me to the C.A.T. scan. She was a beautiful young girl with long, blondish, wavy, hair. She had good skin and dark green eyes.

“Bradley?” she said.

The nurse was Danielle Winters, a girl I had a crush on in high-school.

“Hi Danielle,” I said shamefully as she wheeled me out on the hospital bed.

“What happened to you?” she asked.

I sighed. “Toothbrush,” I said.

“What?”

When I explained to her how I managed to fall on a toothbrush, getting it lodged into my nose, I killed every hope of ever getting to know her better, a high-school dream dead. She just laughed nervously. Then came the long awkward silence.

After the C.A.T. scan, I was informed that I was not going to die, that the toothbrush missed my sinuses and did not break through my skull. I was lucky. Soon, just six hours after my arrival, I would be on my way home. I would not leave, however, before six feet of gauze (string attached) was shoved up my nose. This monstrosity is called a pack. The pack, when finished, looks something like a tampon. It pushes your nose outward, making it gigantic and swollen. A black string hangs out the bottom making the perfect causeway for blood and snot to travel, towards the mouth.

I only had to wear the pack for two months.

And that, I’ll tell you is how I almost managed to kill myself in my girlfriend’s bathroom. I entered the bathroom with a bloody nose and came out having lodged a toothbrush in my nostril. And yes, coincidentally, it *was* the very same nostril that was already bleeding to begin with. *So...*I entered the bathroom with a small problem and came out with an aberration.

Emily is now an internationally renowned interior decorator.

We are no longer dating.