

The Bubble Bust

Thirteen: that peculiar age where you're too old for toy boats but still too young to know you should never admit to still playing with them. Our family car traced its yearly journey from Tucson to the northern reaches, landing once again in Dillon—population: three cows, a stop sign, and a single traffic light (my condolences to Mrs. Henderson and the holdouts for the four-way stop). The town nestled there, snug as a mouse in winter wool, boasting two saddleries for every grocery store, as if horses did the weekly shopping.

Don't get me wrong; I was smitten. It offered everything a young man of my ilk could desire: a rodeo that could convert even the most devoted city slicker, all the fishing and hiking a kid could want, and my Grandpa Fitzwater's weather-worn haven.

Then there were our days of naval architecture along the drainage ditch, where my brothers and I fashioned vessels from the scattered offerings of nature—sticks, leaves, and a few abandoned dreams. These intrepid ships would drift downstream until they met the dreaded Bermuda Triangle of culverts. Would they emerge victorious on the far shore, or surrender to the murky unknown? The ditch kept its secrets.

Aunt Mary and Uncle Steve, my mother's brother, lived on the outskirts of Dillon in a house that wasn't just a house—it was a Better Homes and Gardens showpiece in a subdivision so new the ambition still hung in the air. They'd decorated every inch as if the Queen of England might drop by for Lady Grey at any moment. The place deserved a magazine spread, or at least its own reality show special.

Uncle Steve led the grand tour, and there in the upstairs primary suite stood the monument to my childhood fantasies—a jet tub so vast you could've staged a naval battle with model ships. I'd never experienced one firsthand, but oh, how I'd dreamed.

My closest brush with such luxury came at the Pima County Fair, somewhere between funnel cakes and the ferris wheel of existential despair.

Those whirlpool vendors were bathroom luxury's carnival barkers, standing before their aquatic titans and firing up jets like NASA launching shuttles—all to showcase the raw power of hydraulic relaxation. These tubs bristled with more buttons and knobs than a 747 cockpit; one wrong twist and you'd find yourself suddenly snorkeling.

Before those fair displays, I'd drift into daydreams of soaking in bubbly bliss while *Raiders of the Lost Ark* played on a theater-sized screen just within reach. The cinema of the mind works such magic. Each pass by those displays drew me back longer, until my mother would steer me away with promises of cotton candy and carnival rides. But nothing could outshine those gleaming porcelain dreams.

When Aunt Mary caught me staring at their jet tub like a kid pressed against a candy store window, something in my expression struck a chord. Maybe she remembered her own childhood longings, or perhaps she just pitied the boy transfixed by that magnificent creation. Whatever moved her, she gave that knowing smile of hers and said, "You know, you're welcome to try it out." Those words rang like a winning rodeo bell—pure victory wrapped in small-town kindness. She passed me a fresh towel and gestured toward the sanctuary of bubble bath soap, and I swear the angels broke into song.

Within moments, my glasses were off and I was naked as a jaybird and twice as eager. The bubble bath bottle swam in my nearsighted haze—but who needs labels when destiny beckons? I took my shot in the dark, pouring like a freshman spiking the punch. Half a bottle ought to do the trick. I watched the bubbles multiply, each tiny sphere a promise of joy. The bathroom filled with artificial lavender and something claiming to be "ocean breeze" but closer to grandmother's perfume cabinet.

The jets awoke like angry wasps in a tin can. At first, the bubbles rose with innocent whispers, each foam castle taking gentle shape. Then came the crescendo—a symphony of splashing and gurgling as the bubbles claimed their independence. They swelled with the determination of a soufflé in a pressure cooker, while the jets churned and chuckled at my growing predicament. Even without my glasses, I could sense the unfolding drama of

this bubble uprising. The foam had plans of its own, reaching for sovereignty over not just the tub, but the entire bathroom.

But fear not, for I am a man of action, or at least a teen with enough sense to know when he's bested by bath products. I'll simply turn off the water and jets. Like Pandora's box, though, some things once unleashed refuse to be contained.

The water yielded easily, but those rebellious jets! They posed quite the riddle. I swept away the foam that concealed the tub's instructions, only to find that without my glasses, the labels might as well have been hieroglyphics etched by nearsighted scribes. I couldn't read a thing!

I fumbled at the dials like a teen groping for the car radio, twisting blindly in every direction, hoping for mercy. Somewhere in a parallel universe, another me lounged in a perfect bubble bath, toasting his fortune with cucumber water. But in this reality, I played the part of a submarine captain who'd lost his manual, desperately fighting a bubbly mutiny.

I searched the growing Bubble Mountain, but my glasses had vanished—perhaps staging their own protest against my questionable choices.

Then came the grand folly. In a moment of inspired idiocy, I decided the dial needed not a press but a hearty rotation. Oh, how wrong can one be when armed with nothing but ignorance and slippery hands? With a “clunk” that surely echoed in the Jet Tub Fails Hall of Fame, the panel's backside surrendered to the Bermuda Triangle behind the tub.

A torrent of water rushed into the newly opened abyss. In that moment, I realized I wasn't just the captain of this ship; I was also its iceberg.

Perched on disaster's edge, I launched myself from the tub. The result? Bubble Mountain, long wavering on stability's brink, collapsed like Rome—with more foam and less Latin.

I groped through the sudscape hunting for my towel, but it too had fled into the frothy void. On the edge of despair, modesty surrendering to crisis, I burst into the hallway wrapped only in a cloud of bubbles.

“Help! Help!” I wailed like a banshee.

Aunt Mary appeared, salvation incarnate.

“The bubbles!” I sputtered, pointing wildly at the soapy chaos.

With the poise of a general advancing into battle, she waded into the bubble swamp.

“No problem,” she called back, with the confidence of someone who’d never faced Bubble Mountain.

Then she too discovered the inescapable truth.

“Oh, SHIT!” she exclaimed, shattering her no-cussing streak.

Her expletive hung in the air like a soap bubble, refusing to pop. In that moment, I realized my true achievement: breaking both my aunt’s composure and her bathroom in one fell swoop.

What followed was a tornado of mops, buckets, and increasingly creative curses. Uncle Steve burst onto the scene, took one look, and began calling every plumber in the tri-county area. Finding a plumber in Dillon on a Saturday night, it turned out, was like hunting for a vegetarian at a rodeo.

By Sunday afternoon, salvation arrived in the form of Hank, a craftsman who looked like he’d been fixing pipes since before indoor plumbing was invented.

Surveying the damage, he scratched his beard and drawled, “I’ve seen some doozies in my day. Once had a lady who tried to flush her husband’s toupee. But this? This is going in my autobiography.”

The final tally: thousands in repairs and a lifetime ban on unsupervised bubble baths.

These days, a bottle of bubble bath sends me into a cold sweat. And jet tubs? Nothing but glorified buckets with delusions of grandeur. Give me a simple shower any day—preferably one that doesn't need an emergency plumber on speed dial.