

# Hyperbolic Doubt - And Wherever After To Discover The Truth Behind That Some Timely And Malignant Demon Bad Luck

*by* Bretton B. Holmes

I heard the yelling in the background when I answered the phone. Something about the fact he hadn't replaced the toilet paper. The phone had that ring to it, the ring of the empty toilet paper roll. I knew because I'd heard it before. By that point it had been about fourteen hours since she'd thrown the chair across the living room at him. At least that's what Bill told me when he called that night.

I'm telling this story for two reasons: 1) He can't, and 2) If he could I'm fairly certain he'd get the nitty-gritty of it wrong. I'm not saying I'm any bastion of objectivity myself, but I wasn't the one living with her either. I was a bit removed and it's important to get the facts straight.

The chair didn't have far to go when she'd thrown it. Their apartment was small and the chair was one of those metal folding kind like you see at church picnics. When she'd get mad, you couldn't put anything past her.

Anyway, he had called and was telling me about the chair episode when I heard her yelling at him and a few seconds later I heard this *whoosh* and that's when the phone went dead.

At the time, it didn't occur to me that anything was wrong. Things like that happened all the time because of her. Flying chairs and phones going dead I mean. Knives sometimes too and he'd only make it worse by telling her she better not drop out of school because the carnival would never take her with that aim. He liked to push his luck until his luck started to push back.

The balcony was the only place he could talk in relative solitude. Despite a penchant for cheap metal folding chairs, they lived on the third floor of a fairly nice complex, across from the married student housing and boy wasn't *that* a bane for him every time they'd go to class. "*We'll be living there soon*" was heard on a regular basis. The only other problem being the apartment was only four-hundred square feet. With a bad relationship and three cats on an unremitting testicle hunt, the walls tended to close in on you.

The toilet paper had been the least of the issue. It was just something else for her to yell about. See, what she was *really* upset about was the bank account. The bank account had been his, then *theirs*, and now it was *his* again. I told him I didn't think it was a great idea putting her on it. There are Perceptions and Truth and there are Perceptions of the Truth. I'm fairly certain Dear Old Descartes would assert that math was involved in Bill's troubles. Pooling their money was a rather dumb idea. I account this observation to the fact that I'd been working on a paper for my Logic & Reasoning 311 class about Descartes, this French philosopher who based much of his theories on math and architecture. Descartes would have told Bill that "If there is one problem with one variable, the chance that adding another variable increases the complexity of the problem is assured" or something like it, only in French. I'd bet he'd also see the element of the balcony as a blatant harbinger of demise as well. What's so strange is that Bill was studying architecture. The irony is, well, steely...

Pardon the pun.

We'd been somewhere, the library I think and when we got to his car he'd opened the trunk.

"Look at that..." he'd said nonchalantly.

What I saw was something that smacked of a deep seeded torment that refused to go away. It was like an inner demon on display, and I was reminded of a summer I'd spent with my grandparents in Texas; the hottest one there in ten years. I think it got up to 107 degrees one day. The townhouse complex where they lived only had a few other kids my age there during the summers and one of them was the most solid epitome of evil I've ever met. We'd been playing in the sprinklers one afternoon and he decides to go for a walk and "check on things." So I go with him, naturally wondering what 'things' he meant since they sounded pretty pressing.

I had no idea people like that actually existed, but there he was, going from tree to tree checking up on the frogs he'd wired to the branches by the hind legs, upside down. The damn things were just baking there. Some had long since shriveled up and others were well on their way. He was totally unaffected by it all. I went back to my grandparents and told my grandfather and he shook his head and said, "I don't want you around that kid anymore." He didn't get an argument from me. Later, when I was in high school and it came time to hack up a frog for biology, I couldn't do it. Everybody said I was a sissy. I didn't care. I still have nightmares about it.

What I saw in Bill's trunk that night after the library were stacks upon stacks of (as silly as it might sound) magazines.

*Wedding* and *bridal* magazines.

Now, it may not sound like much, like I say, but it scared me. It scared me because I knew what it meant for Bill. Those magazines were her wired up frogs and there were a hell of a lot of them. Must have been, I don't know a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty in there. An immoderate interest considering Bill told me those were the issues they didn't have room for in their apartment.

"I can't even get my golf clubs in here," he'd said.

I could tell it upset him more than things usually did. There wasn't too much that phased Bill. It had been me I probably would have said something a helluva lot more severe than lamenting over golf club space.

Then he said "I'm putting her on the account."

I looked at him while he stared into the tractor beam of those magazines, the covers shiny under the clear fifteen-watt light of the trunk door. It was a consolation and capitulation. A 'good faith gesture' on his part that would never be enough to keep her off his back. It was a gesture that only served to complicate things more.

"You think that's a good idea?"

"Look at this. What can I do?"

Moving out of that goddamned apartment would have been a good start and I'd told him as much on a fairly regular basis. He always came back with the same thing: she said she'd kill herself if he left. Well, hell, what more reason do you need? I think he knew I was right. If he didn't then, he sure as hell does now. Problem is though, and I'm not looking for any I-told-you-so, he can't exactly tell me I was right, but I'll get to the why of that later.

They met, hell, I can't even remember when now, all I know is that he'd gone over to her dorm room with a damn rose between his teeth not two days after they'd met. He'd given her a ride three-hundred miles south so she could see her younger sister of sixteen who'd apparently attempted suicide. The red flag of red flags and he took it for courtship. Later on, after they'd moved in together it was Bill had an evil streak or Bill didn't love her enough, or *at all* at times, or that he would cheat on her, or (and this one was my favorite) that she wasn't good enough for him to sleep with. There are people meant to be together and there are those meant to live worlds away from each other and they were of the latter contingent.

All this and the cats. I couldn't go over there and watch the game Monday nights because of all the goddamned cats she had. There were only three of them but by God if you had a beer in your hand it better not be anywhere near you testicles or those fuckers would swoop down and I mean *dig*. I found out later from her sister that she'd spent upwards of four nights a week when she was in high school training those goddamned things to do just that because she'd seen a show on Oprah about the problems couples face and

Number One on the list had been Monday Night Football. I mean, come on, it's a friggin' football game. Besides that she wasn't very welcoming on the whole. She wouldn't even say hello or Kiss My Ass or anything when you walked in. I'm not the type has to have hors'd'oeuvres or anything but she wouldn't lift a finger when company was over except to flip the page of whatever bridal magazine she was into. You're probably wondering how hard it is to find the fridge inside a 400 square foot apartment, right? Just throw a few testicle-driven cats in there and difficulty quotient triples.

I guess that was the first time I'd actually seen her do it...

The bathroom thing.

I'd been over there, fifteen minutes or so one Monday night. I think the Falcons were playing Buffalo or some other half-assed team. I was trying to guard my groin with one hand and swing away at cats in between quick slugs of my rapidly warming and progressively frothing beer. Every so often when a cat would get a good bead on me or Bill she'd let out a little chuckle from the kitchen while flipping through one of her bridal magazines.

The Falcons were setting up for an onside-kick early in the first quarter for some unknown reason and as Bill and I were asking each other what the hell that was about, she came up with *Bride's Today*, pointing and asking if *this* kind of hem would be better suited to her frame or something.

I think Bill said "Just a second." That's all it was, just a "I'll-be-glad-to-let-you-know-my-opinion-and-thank-you-for-asking-me-*but*-I'd-like-to-figure-out-why-Atlanta-has-foolishly-decided-to-go-for-an onside-kick-early-in-the-first-quarter-because-my-fear-is-you-see-that-the-Earth-has-suddenly-spun-off-course-and-we're-about-to-hit-Pluto."

There was this suspended silence. I can't really explain it, other than to say it just kind of hung there. The television was still on, the refs commiserating over the play we'd just missed and the announcers, well, I guess they were as stunned as we were based on their lack of commentary and that's when she decided to huck that two-and-a-half pound magazine at his head. The whole incident

happened in slow-motion and the magazine looked like a bird of prey; the pages flapping wildly and on a collision course with Bill's nose.

I remember thinking Bill had amazingly quick reflexes as I said something along the lines of JESUS CHRIST when I saw that thing whiz by less than an inch from his eye. He'd be in worse shape than he is at present, I can tell you, he hadn't seen it coming. Before I got *Christ* out she'd run into the bathroom, slammed the door and locked it.

I looked at the bathroom door and turned back to ask him what the hell just happened and when I did the referee blew his whistle calling the play dead. From the look in his eyes, Bill was pretty dead too. He apologized to me without blinking and went to the bathroom door.

"Please...open the door..."

I listened for her response, but it never came. He must have stood there another fifteen minutes. I know because by the time I went outside for a smoke it was already coming on halftime. I'd turned the sound down on the television. I don't know why. I guess I was hoping as he was that she'd say something or come out and I didn't want to miss it. Not because I'm anything near a scrutinizing or snooping SOB, but for that kind of tension to be relieved you have to see it firsthand. The sounds of a football game in the background would only have made things seem worse. The effort to not acknowledge that there was anything wrong was the problem I was having, and so back out onto the balcony I went.

I watched him there, through the sliding glass door, leaning as he was with his back to me, head down in a sort of silent prayer that she'd come out. In the time it took me to smoke my cigarette, I must have seen his head pop up five or six times, which appeared to mean he thought she was coming out. He later told me he was actually listening to the sound of what he thought was her taking the blade out of his razor. I didn't need to ask why she might do that, but she could have been masturbating for all he knew. It was just a matter of your perspective I guess.

And speaking of that, it occurs to me not so suddenly that there were a few firsthand episodes I'd had in witnessing what a nutcracker she could be. The magazine thing, while weird and a little over the top, doesn't really give you a good idea of her capabilities.

One day, we'd all gone to the library. It was Bill's favorite place. He'd get all excited about the books on architecture. He couldn't buy any of his own since all his funds were at that time pooled with hers, and architecture books are pretty damned expensive. I could never figure out how to find whatever it was I needed to, so I'd take him along and he'd show me how to go about locating a particular book or periodical. He was very helpful that way. The other reason he liked going there was because she hated the library and would either stay home or plant herself near all the wedding and bridal magazines. This at times could present a problem because if Bill and I happened to be somewhere in the Dead Languages section, it'd take her forever to find us and by the time she did she was all red-faced and sweating and *pissed*.

It happened that way the night before I got his phone call. I was looking for information about the meditation Descartes had written on how a person can find the answer to a situation that appears impossible to rectify. I'd give you a snippet of the paper I'd written for the class, but I can't find it anywhere. Not the best one I'd done but I'd pulled a B+ on the thing. My professor had said that the title was too long though; *Hyperbolic Doubt and Wherever After To Discover The Truth Behind That Some Timely and Malignant Demon Bad Luck*. The paper dealt mainly with handicapping horses and incorporated the Descartes Meditation as a means to beat the twenty percent track take. I'd been trying to explain the theory to Bill that if you look at a particular question with complete and unmitigated doubt, you'll discover the truth of it. The concept was a little foreign to Bill and he said we all had predispositions and they're hell to overcome. I told him that right he was, but sometimes things can push a person to realize what Descartes meant and doubt even the most evident truths. He kind of shook his head and started

to say something and just as I *thought* I saw the cloud over his head start to break she walked up waving *Bridal Bouquet Banquet* in his goddamned face.

Five minutes later one of the librarians had to come tell us we'd better go otherwise they'd have to call campus security. Bill and the screaming-about-where-we'd-been-this-whole-time girlfriend went outside into the quad where sound *really* travelled and I offered up what apology I could to the librarian. I don't know why, I guess it's because I didn't want her to think I was actually contributing to the lunacy she'd just witnessed.

There are some things you just can't explain no matter how much you'd like to.

When we got to the car she shut up all of a sudden. I was going over to their place to use his computer to type up my paper because my computer usage card was damaged and I was waiting on another one. I wasn't looking forward to sitting there trying to concentrate while she swished suicidal in the bathroom.

We got to their apartment and he tried, I got to hand it to him, he tried to make me as comfortable as possible, but it was that look, that look in his eyes I couldn't get past. He was caged and beaten down; the walls had closed in on him as far as they could and he'd relegated himself to the fact that he'd opened his mouth and told the wrong girl what she wanted to hear. Now he realized it hadn't been worth what he ended up with. There'd come a time when she'd get tired of waiting for the ring that would never come (turns out it was the next day) and even though she'd only been out of her parents house for six months, everything she'd been led to believe about the way it all worked would be explained as a fallacy.

I wondered what old Descartes would have said to the both of them. The lack of objectivity in that room when we arrived would have blown off his shorts for sure. The open handed slap she'd given Bill across the face had certainly iced up my veins.

When we got inside Bill had gone straight to the fridge and she'd followed him in there. I'd put my bag down next to the computer and saw Bill reaching down into the back of the fridge, his

head obscured by the door. She was standing on the other side of the door and when he stood up, CRACK! She got him with a left hand. He hardly blinked or moved and I thought it probably wasn't the first time it had happened. His cheek went red and she headed for the bathroom in silence. I thought the damn door was going to come off its hinges as hard as she slammed it.

I suggested we go out onto the balcony for a smoke. It was nice up there. It had rained while we were in the library and up there on their third floor apartment you didn't get the humidity like on the ground floor. All you got was a cool breeze and that sweet clean scent of the rain. No deodorant companies ever come close to that smell even though they try year in and year out.

We stood there a bit, smoking our cigarettes, not saying anything. I wanted to say something; *anything* to try and forget what I'd just seen, but all I could keep thinking about were those damn frogs from when I was a kid, and then the trunk full of bridal magazines Bill showed me and then the frogs and then the magazines again until I came around to wondering what the hell I was going to do if I had to take a piss. It was winding me up terribly, so much so that I sucked my damn cigarette down to the point where the cherry burned the inside of my right index finger. Bill asked if I was all right and I said I was even though it was a lie. I ran inside and put my finger under the kitchen faucet and found that now I did have to take a piss and then I heard him from the balcony outside.

"You better get busy with that paper you're gonna get out of here before midnight." I had five pages to crank out. I reluctantly told him I had to piss and he went to the bathroom door.

"But he's got to go..."

It didn't matter. She was in there. Bill told me I could go take a whiz off the balcony, but that seemed a little odd, even though it had just rained. I suggested maybe I could use some sort of receptacle and then dump it over the balcony. He agreed that was a better idea and gave me an empty Cain's coffee can.

Bill took up a spot on the bed in the bedroom. His face lit by the light coming from underneath the door of the bathroom looked patiently sallow. Almost as if he had no idea how long it would take her to emerge and not a care about it either. I went out onto the balcony and facing the wall, did my thing into the coffee can. It was loud as hell and I swore the people living on the other side of the complex could hear my business.

Relieved, albeit more publicly than I would have cared for, I started typing. I really wish I had a bit of that paper here somewhere. It was damn good. There was this one line from it went something like "...and so, it is by the inherent virtue of Descartes' first Meditation, of the things we may hold in doubt, that man can wield Aspiration to become something more than what man is..."

I'm not sure if that's exactly how it went but it was a good line. I got to a point typing there where I only heard the words in my head as they fell onto the screen, a trance, and then suddenly I almost fell over in my chair.

The door to the bathroom flew open blasting Bill in a swath of silent light. It was the scariest goddamned thing, outside of the frogs of course, that I'd ever seen. I almost expected that thing from *Alien* to come out of there. In hindsight, I guess I did.

She rushed him. I guess that's the best way of putting it. When she came out she was totally naked. I just saw a flash of skin and hair and what I thought was blood and the thought cracked through my mind that she'd decided to take him with her before she bled-out from all the little He-Loves-Me, He-Loves-Me-Not nicks she'd been administering on her person. Then the notion that people in these types of situations had to answer all variety of investigative questions from brooding men armed to the teeth occurred to me, and as I got up to go get her off of him, I stopped at the doorway and saw something worse.

Most guys on seeing a naked woman, albeit a *crazy* naked woman humping their friend while company is over might not think twice about that. To see that kind of thing right there in front of you can be a little unnerving. I suppose what shook me in hindsight was

the lack of emotion I saw. It was the act of sheer desperation for survival on her part. Like when a water buffalo gets tackled by a lion at a watering hole on the Discovery Channel. I was frozen for a bit waiting for someone other than myself to say something. I was a little disappointed Bill didn't make any apologies over all her grunting, but I guess when you've got a crazy naked woman on top of you, apologies are like one-legged men at a square dance... against the wall and pretty damned useless.

He didn't call me that night after I *walked* back to my apartment on the other side of campus. I remember it was a good walk though. Quiet without the tension I'd been feeling in my gut all night. I didn't get my paper finished until the next morning when I'd gone to the library and begged the librarian I'd seen the night before to grant me a computer to use. She didn't have a problem with it after I explained not-so-graphically what had happened the night before.

The chair incident had happened as a result of his question to her about why she wouldn't let me use the bathroom that night. At least he asked her later. When he'd posed the question, she hadn't said anything, she just picked up one of those gray metal folding chairs and hurled it at his head; missing the sliding glass door and Bill's head by an inch or so. He brooded over whether or not to take her off the bank account after that and about fourteen hours since she'd thrown that chair at him he'd told her his plans. She'd locked herself in the bathroom again and he'd gone out onto the balcony to give me a call to tell me. I don't know why he felt the need to do that. I guess he knew I'd back his decision and had a modicum of understanding with regard to the situation. I didn't think it was any big deal that the phone had cut out. I did get a call the next day, after the last time I'd heard from him and the phone had cut out. It was from the local police department asking when I'd been over there last and could I come over to verify a few things.

When I got there the cop had the Cain's coffee can in a bag marked 'evidence' which had me a little worried. I asked him what had happened because Bill wasn't there and neither was she.

The cop said that Bill had been taken to the local hospital with a broken back and she, well, she was dead. He told me not to worry that Bill had explained the coffee can before they took him out. They just had to keep everything in there organized for the family to go through. That was when I met her sister and she told me about the cats. They were still there and while I was talking to the cop another officer had picked up an empty beer bottle out of the sink to put it into one of the evidence bags and the Calico shot straight for his groin. The guy nearly shit his pants and me, well, I laughed. I couldn't help it. The cop told me that I'd been the last one getting a phone call from them. I told him that yeah, the phone had gone dead but that kind of thing happened all the time.

He'd called me that night to tell me that he'd done it, that he'd taken her off the bank account. While he went out onto the balcony, she'd gone into the bathroom, stripped down and waited. When he'd closed the sliding glass door she'd come flying out of the bathroom and thrown the sliding glass door open. When she did that, the telephone cord got stuck in the track and was yanked out of the wall.

She'd rammed him while he was right up against the railing there from what the cop said and as he turned around from the sound of the sliding glass door opening and the phone cutting out, it'd been too late to move out of the way. By the time they got three floors down, she was underneath him and the force of Bill falling on top of her had killed her. Her body had cushioned him enough that he lived. Weird.

Now, he's laying on a kind of raised lounge chair for his back in the living room of my first floor apartment. I put him there next to the window because the nurse at the hospital said it would be better for his circulation or something to be there when the sun can shine on his face and he'd be back on his feet that much faster. His jaw is wired shut which is why I'm telling all this instead of him. That, and because he'd get the nitty-gritty of it all wrong most likely. It's important to get the facts straight. I'm not saying I'm any bastion of objectivity, but I wasn't the one living with her either...

THE END.

