

Drowning in Luxury

by Chris Ladd

EDITORIAL EDITOR

There's a man with a shop-vac and a blue jacket in my room right now, and he's here because I've done something very stupid.



WHERE THE HELL IS WAYNE, ME?

Some reference, I think, will help. I'm staying in a hotel, and the hotel where I'm staying is very nice. If I told you the name of the hotel you'd probably know it, from one of its other

branches or from television or from the movies. It's kind of famous.

Only realize that while I waited for this man in the blue jacket with the shop-vac, I had the choice of shifting a five or a twenty from wallet to front-left pocket to prepare myself to tip this guy when he leaves, and I chose the twenty. It's a very nice hotel.

If your parents ever went there for their honeymoon or something, they probably stole a couple of the robes the hotel leaves on a hook on the bathroom door and on wooden hangers in the closet, and those robes probably still hang in your parents' closets to this day, yellowed, but still hanging there.

Those robes, partly, are why this man is here with the vacuum.

I've been at this hotel for four days, and I'm trying not to get used to the levels of comfort I'm offered here, from the marble covered bathroom, to the thick, soft, padded carpeting, to the king-sized featherbed and 400 thread-

count down comforter. That bed has something to do with the man and the shop-vac and the twenty-dollar bill in my left pocket, too. The man is here because, about an hour ago, I decided to take a bath.

My parents have one of those bathtubs that's shaped like a normal bathtub, with a normal shower fixture and everything, but with metal jets cut into the side that shoot out water like a Jacuzzi. You're not supposed to use soap in them, because it gums up the insides of the pipes that shoot the water out, but I used to take baths all the time when I was a kid and squeeze half a bottle of shampoo into the water, cutting canyons wide enough to breathe from into the chin-scraping suds with the backs of my hands.

Now, at school, there's no opportunity. Dorm bathrooms are messy and uninviting, and furnished with dreary walk-in shower stalls and suitemates that use all of your soap without asking. If college suites did have bathtubs, I'm not sure I'd go near them; my floor has one communal tub already, and it smells like a paper mill.

This hotel, on the other hand, smells great, and because of the spotless marble bathroom, the clean, white ceramic of the tub, and the terry-cloth robes with the logo of the hotel embroidered into the chests, I've taken a bath every day since I got here, four days ago. Yesterday, I took two. Today is my last day. It's 8:15 a.m. I'd planned to take a bath this morning before I left, but, owing to recent events, I don't think I'll have the time. And, if I did, I don't think I should. Owing to recent events.

I'm typing this on the very left-most side of the bed, so that the corner of the wall partition hides me from the man in the jacket with the vacuum cleaner. I can hear it struggle and whine when the nozzle lies flat against the carpet, like a car engine downshifting through a steep hill. It's loud enough so that I can't hear my fingers tapping on the keys of my laptop.

“The bathroom itself, which was merely elegant and understated before, now ranked among the fanciest wading pools I'd ever seen.”

I woke this morning at five past seven. The light from outside was still weak and yellow then, and at around a quarter past, I slunk from the bed, padded along the carpet into the bathroom in my underwear, and relieved myself. Then I turned the bath faucet all the way to hot, pulled the drain lever up toward the ceiling, and crawled back into the bed to watch a few minutes of television on this, my last day.

I don't know how much time passed between the decision to get into the bed and the impulse to check the bathwater. Not exactly. It could have been ten minutes or fifteen, maybe even twenty. I could have drifted off; I'm not sure. My memory's not best in the morning, and the noise from the vacuum makes it hard to think.

I did know something was very wrong, and had a good idea what, before I ever made it into the bathroom at all.

I knew when my bare feet squished onto the blue padded carpet from the bed, and water welled up to fill the spaces between my toes. A dark, wet fan had spread from the bathroom to the doorway and the closet, and into the main part of the room. The bath-

room itself, which was merely elegant and understated before, now ranked among the fanciest wading pools I'd ever seen: water cascading down the sides of the bathtub, splashing two inches deep into Italian marble tile and charging out the bathroom door and onto the carpet. Shallow waves bounced off the walls behind the toilet and underneath the counter.

I nearly fell down and hit my head on the stone floor of that bathroom in my haste to wade through the slippery-bottomed puddle and crank the bath spigot rightwards and off.

The carpet just outside the bathroom was fully saturated; water piled a quarter-inch deep over its surface for about a foot and a half as it flowed out and sucked itself through the carpet and into the padding. Using bath tow-

els, I made barricades and pushed as much water as I could from the main section of room back and into the bathroom.

The arc of flooded carpet extended underneath the doorway and into the main hall, and so I wrung out one of the towels in the draining bathtub and set about inspecting the damage. From the space beneath the door, water had pillowed around on either side of the frame opening, wrapping against the seam of the outer hallway and—

click.

I stared for a full minute at the squinting black outside of my peephole and at the gold outline of my room number above it, barefoot and pantless in the fifteenth floor hallway. At my feet, the pages of my complimentary Washington Post were curled with the water from the bathroom. The room beside me had ordered room service, and their discarded plates of Eggs Benedict sat beside the door.

I'm glad, in a way, for the ten minutes I spent half-dressed pacing that hallway, glad I was forced to call the front desk from the courtesy phone by the elevator, glad that the man from security who opened my room got his shoe wet. Because otherwise this other man, with the jacket and the vacuum, would not be here. Otherwise I would still be on the floor on my hands and knees, wringing out towels and pushing water around the room.

From the left side of the bed, I can see the water start to disappear as the vacuum sucks it up. I finger the twenty in my pocket. No bath today. In an hour, I'll need to be packed and into a cab to the airport. I can only hope that nobody floods the plane.