

Tell

Take a bath with a stranger? Hey, it's good, clean fun

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A dozen candles illuminated the bathroom with a soft glow — just enough light to see the bubbles and my glass of wine. I was calm, relaxed, at ease. For a fleeting moment, I wondered whether I could get electrocuted from wearing a telephone headset while submerged in water. But I sank into the tub and remained unshocked — at least in the electrical sense.

Most of my first dates have been pretty ordinary: a restaurant with white tablecloths, a stroll on the beach, an outdoor lunch. Simple. Conventional. Safe. There was an accepted script and I followed it. But my first date with Brandon veered way off any traditional course.

We had been e-mailing each other for weeks. He hadn't asked me out, seemingly content with the occasional e-mail and phone call. Then on a Monday night, after an interesting conversation through cyberspace, he wrote: "Do you have a bath tub?"

"Yes," I replied.

Moments later, another message appeared: "Would you like to take a bath with me?"

Before I could reply, the phone rang.

"So, what do you think?" he asked.

Convinced he was either crazy or creepy, I detailed a litany of reasons why I couldn't possibly take a bath with someone I had never met. Even if we were 74.3 miles apart.

"I'm not that kind of girl. I don't know you! We'll be naked!"

I never imagined how romantic his counter-argument would be.

He didn't state the obvious — that he couldn't touch me. He didn't promise not to picture me naked. He didn't even offer an in-person date so I would know this bath meant something.

Instead he said, "Let's just say we *do* meet and we *do* hit it off and we actually end up together for a long, long time — maybe even forever. Wouldn't this make a great story?"

There was no denying it. He was right. After all, if the foray in the bath went south, we never had to meet.

"Call me back in 10 minutes," I said.

Somehow this man had charmed his way into my tub, I mused as I drew my bath ... but then I started to reason with myself.

What if "the bath" was just this guy's S.O.P., I thought. A ploy to win my affections. Maybe he's just some kind of serial bathtub Romeo.

I got in. But before I could relax, I needed answers. So I put on my headset and began to interview him.

Me: "How many people have you taken in the tub with you?"

Him: "Three, counting you." Hmmm ... not as bad as I thought.

Me: "Why are you doing it with me?"

Him: "Because I feel an unexplainable connection to you."

Me: "How can you feel a connection to me? You don't even know me."

Him: "Uh ... did you miss the unexplainable part?"

Smart aleck.

Me: "OK, fine. So what's the bath protocol?"

Him: "Well, usually it involves singing," he said, and launched into a rendition of "Splish Splash, I was taking a bath..."

Great! Now I was bathing with Bobby Darin.

Something about being immersed in water and hearing Bath Man sing released my inhibitions in a way alcohol couldn't touch. I didn't censor my thoughts. I wasn't concerned about sharing too much. I just relaxed in the tub and started singing with him.

Usually it takes months for me to let a suitor hear me sing. And for good reason. Think William Hung. In a dress. But the anonymity of the bath washed away my fears. Something about Brandon's soothing voice and disarming sense of humor made me feel safe, comfortable and secure.

We discussed the possibility of never meeting and just preserving this incredible two-dimensional "non-relationship" through e-mail, phone and bubbles. But ultimately, we knew we had to meet, and soon.

The next night when the waiter showed us to a table by the window, I felt it again — the sense that I could get electrocuted, but remain safe. I looked up at Brandon with a million questions in my eyes. He turned to the waiter.

"Can you give us some time, sir? I haven't seen this girl in forever."

Damn, this guy is good!