

### **"Dang the Fang"**

I was going for a double back flip—a tight, tucked kind that only ex-gymnast or ex-cheerleaders could do. I was both. And proud of it. I was the athlete that my boyfriend wanted to be. And I was the girlfriend who had the talent that none of his ex-girl friends ever had. It was fun to show off. Whenever I spotted a patch of grass I always rushed over to it and did cartwheels, handstands and flippity-flips. And when there was a trampoline around, I was doing all sorts of crazy things.

So when I spied the trampoline at my boyfriend's dad's company park picnic one weekend back in Tucson, I had no choice but to bless it with my bouncing. It wasn't a regular, backyard trampoline. This one was special. A souped-up kind decked out with two poles, bungee cord ropes, and a leather harness to strap you in. It was made for people who had no idea what they were doing and gave them a chance to twist and twirl, and flip and fly without possessing any actual talent. I'd been on one of those trampolines before during spring break in college. And I just floated in the air while I spun around and around and around for all to ewwww and ahhhhh. It was fun. It was a rush. And lucky for me, it was possible to experience that Olympic gymnast feeling again with my boyfriend, his family, and all 314 of their friends and co-workers, watching.

After waiting for half an hour and telling a few punky kids that I was next and that they're boneheads for trying to cut, I climbed onto the trampoline with style, grace and attitude of an authentic collegiate athlete. The second the trampoline worker said "go" I jumped and jumped and soared high into the sky. It was a hotter than usual Saturday morning in Tucson and the breeze cooled my balmy body. The higher I jumped, the more I could see. I was trying to see if his mom and dad were watching. They were. And now it was my time to shine.

I could have done a single back for starters. Just to warm up. But since I had been flipping around since the time I could crawl, I was beyond warm. I was beyond hot. I was on fire. And more than ready to show off. Halfway through flip number two, I felt a pop on the back of my head. It felt just like

when I was a kid and my older brother would smack me with a board. But there was no board here. And no brother. Just air. And an audience.

"Mother maaamaaaaaaa," I silently screamed as I scrambled to my feet. What the hell just happened? I was supposed to be air born, not mat ridden. Everyone just stared at me. Their mouths ajar. Eyes bulging. Their energy was on level nine. A few even clenched their hands over their jaws. As I slowly made my way to my feet, some snot-nosed, pimply-faced, yahoo yelled, "ewwww! You're bleeding! That's disgusting!!"

What the hell, I thought. Bleeding? What was bleeding? You mean, I broke skin? Worried that my childhood fear might have actually happened and I had popped out one of my eyes, I quickly opened and closed each eyelid in rapid fire. Thankfully, I still had my sight. It wasn't good. But it was there. Next, I ran my tongue back and forth over my two front teeth to make sure I didn't snap one in half. Nope, those pearly whites were still intact. But my head did hurt. And hurt bad. Actually, the pain was coming more from my mouth. And as I recounted the preceding events, I began to gently bounce. I didn't want anyone to think that such a simple snafu would get me off the mat.

I figured, a few spits over the edge of the mat and the blood would be gone. It wasn't. But, apparently, something else almost was. As the pain and fear intensified, I stopped bouncing up and down, slithered out of the worthless harness, leapt to the ground, pushed through the crowd, and made a mad dash for the bathroom.

The part of my tongue that wasn't severed protruded out in a pancake-thin, ameba shape and was quickly turning white. I was nauseas. Mortified. And embarrassed beyond belief. Swishing out my mouth with water didn't help. The reverse force of the water peeled back the fresh flaps of flesh and made my tongue sting like hell. I needed to lie down. Was having hot flashes and was no where near menopause. Within minutes, the urine-laced bathroom floor became my new best friend. It was cold. It

was comforting. My boyfriend, Slim, who had followed me into the bathroom, was not. Slim kept asking if I was okay. No I wasn't okay. I was dying. If the blood loss didn't kill me, the humiliation would.

I think Slim was more concerned with me ruining his plans for the evening than me ruining my ability to ever speak again. We were supposed to attend Slim's ten-year high school reunion in few hours and I had just monsterized my mouth. While most detested high school reunions, I couldn't wait to go. His ex-girlfriend was going to be there. And I was going to be there with the man Miss Arizona would never have. I didn't spend the last four months at the gym everyday to be benched this easily. I had every intention to shake off the pain and persevere.

After two hours the bleeding stopped. After three, my tongue swelled to the size of a Platypus tail and turned black. Slim made me ice it. Icing a tongue is not like icing an ankle. There is no such thing as grinning and bearing it. I finally knew what it felt like to have a speech impediment. I never should have made fun of Suzy Mellon's slur in pre-K. As the evening inched on, I figured I'd pop some aspirin, down a drink, and be good to go. Half an hour before we were supposed to leave, I came to terms that there was no way I could attend the reunion. I might have looked like a polished peach, but I sounded like Elmer Fudd. I'm a Texas graduate. I know oodles of big words and five languages. My mouth is my masterpiece. There was no way I'd be able to sit in silence all night. And there was really no way I was actually going to utter anything audible. I told Slim to go with out me. He didn't want to. I didn't want him to either but I felt obligated to lisp that line.

A few weeks later his best friend said that Miss Arizona broke down in convulsions when she discovered Slim was a no-show. She had been preparing herself for that reunion for years. She went from an A to a C. An eight to a four. And Marshall's to Marshall Fields. Guess she thought the reunion was going to be like the Master Card commercial when the girl shows up all deck out and the ex kicks himself for letting her slip away. Since real life is never like TV, here's one for you Miss Arizona: "New

knockers: \$9,500. Personal Trainer: \$4,000. Designer dress: \$2,000. The look on your face when you realize your ex is your ex for a reason...priceless."

My tongue eventually healed. But I'm not sure Miss Arizona's heart ever did.