

## The Bed

You could show up at our little hospital down by the ocean on a stormy night with your leg in a sling and your body running a temperature of 111 degrees and they would say you're not sick enough to be admitted. But try to get discharged after a brief stay to go home to your hearth and dog and they'll tell you they're going to keep you another night ... or maybe two or three ...because they need to do more tests, or some law just changed or the cafeteria workers were planning a special feast for you. You shouldn't believe me, but I know you will, because you've no doubt seen the same kind of craziness in your dealings with the medical community.

What could make less sense? A hospital cuts costs and asks for volunteers to serve the meals to save wages. Then they go out and buy a few space age beds than cost up to \$20,000 each. And on the morning I checked in for a day of tests ordered by my overly careful doctor, there sat just such a high tech bed in the middle of the room I'd been assigned so I could rest between procedures (and not wander out of their sight.) It was a beautifully designed product of modern engineering. It truly resembled a sleek Star Fighter space craft from a Sci-Fi movie. On a stand nearby lay a well designed and colorful brochure with descriptions and explanations of the controls.

I climbed into the bed to test it out. Staring back at me were more buttons than I'd probably find in the cockpit of a 767. The magic carpet to dreamland was topped off with an automatic air powered "therapy surface" mattress that adjusted itself to my body's contours. It did so continuously by employing an onboard computer to bleed air from one of the many air pockets to the next and adjust the pressures. It fit itself to my back as I lay down. When I turned on my side, the mattress quietly whirred and fit itself to my shape in three seconds flat, accommodating my hips bulging out and my waist carving inward. OK, my waist has not carved inward for forty years, but the bed would have followed any shape presented to it.

Tiring of the novelty, I swung my legs over the edge and sat up at the head end of the bed. I couldn't wait to show off the bed to Willard when he arrived. My 85 year old neighbor had come along to keep me company on what would prove to be a long day of tests. Twenty minutes before at the hospital's front door, as I headed

off to my room assignment, Willard had disappeared down the hall to look for coffee.

To tell the truth, being seen with Willard was a bit embarrassing, especially in this hospital. He'd stopped here the weekend before on his way home from a party at his hunting club. As he told the story, he felt a bit woozy and pulled into the ER hoping to register for a room. The nurse told him to go sleep it off in his car. "This ain't Motel 6?" he said to the security guard who helped him out. "Then why you got all these lights on?"

Willard now returned with his coffee ... I was not allowed a cup. He looked around the room for somewhere to relax and pulled a chair over to the foot of the bed and sat down.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Nothing. I'm waiting for a young and pretty nurse to come undress me."

"One that likes old guys?" he said.

"There must be one somewhere."

"Age before beauty," Willard said. "I'll happily offer to take your place."

Willard leaned back in the chair and swung his feet up on the mattress.

"Willard, please take your boots off my bed."

"But there's no lounge chair for us old folks," he said.

"You're confusing this self adjusting bed, Willard. It just began to recognize me lying on it and now it's wondering how I grew two extra feet with boots on."

"Self what?" said Willard.

"I just took a test drive," I said. "You jump in and it feels odd at first, like the worst lumpy bed you ever slept in."

"Sounds like my Aunt Elva's bed when I was a lad," said Willard.

"Maybe," I said. "I was never in your Aunt Elva's bed."

"Neither was Uncle Jed after their fifth young-un came along," said Willard.

"But then you feel the bed start to move right under you," I said.

"Like when I get home to bed after the Annual Hunter's Ball and Beer Bash," said Willard.

"No, not quite. The bed doesn't move. The surface of the mattress kinda crawls."

"Like Aunt Elva's bed in the fall before she put the mouse traps around the house."

"If I were your Uncle Jed, Willard, I'd sleep in the barn."

"Mostly he did," said Willard

"But within seconds," I said, "you can feel the entire mattress re-assemble itself to fit the contour of your body. It's like magic, Willard."

"Abra cadaver," he said.

“That’s Abracadabra, Willard.”

“Aunt Elva did parlor tricks,” he said. “That’s what she’d say to make me disappear.”

“What kind of tricks, Willard.”

“Not for children,” he said in a high pitched voice, shaking his finger at me.

“And Uncle Jed?” I asked.

“Her best customer. That’s why they wanted me to disappear.”

“Willard, take your feet off the bed and listen to what happens.”

Willard stirred himself and removed one foot, placing it on the floor. The boot clunked loudly on the tile and small bits of mud dislodged and fell around the heel. We both listened. Almost inaudible, somewhere under the bed a small air pump began to whirl. The look on Willard’s face was one of incredulity. His eyebrows shot up.

“It’s moving,” he said. “It’s pushing up my other foot.

Now the pump sped up a little.

“It’s looking for you, Willard. The bed is wondering where you went.”

Willard took his other foot off the bed, leaned in and spoke to the side of the mattress. “Don’t worry, little bed, I’m still here. I’m sorry I put my feet on you.”

Now another pump switched on under the bed and the mattress began to move beneath me.

“Did I say somethin’ wrong?” said Willard

“No, but maybe the bed is confused. Maybe it’s never seen separate weights at either end of the mattress.”

A third pump began to whirl and a flapping noise issued out from below.

“Holy ...”

“Willard, get up and sit down at the end of bed. It wants to know you’re still here.”

“I just told it I was here.”

“It’s still learning, Willard, and it doesn’t have ears. You have to sit on it.”

The hissing of valves kicked in as Willard jumped up and sat on the mattress. I hadn’t heard that noise on my test drive.

“It may not be programmed to recognize two people on the mattress,” I said. “It’s only a single bed.” Willard lay back, draping himself across the very foot of the bed. Then he sat up and again lay back. I swung my legs up and tucked my feet underneath me at the head of the bed.

“No, Willard,” I found myself shouting. “Stop the sit-ups. The bed can’t figure it out.”

Beneath me the bed began to undulate, as if writhing in agony over a new discovery it could not fathom. In its short life since leaving the factory floor the onboard computer had never encountered two people on its

surface with a third force rhythmically dropping down from above as Willard popped up and down doing his sit-ups. Maybe the bed’s brain was struggling to imagine its first tennis match taking place across the surface of the mattress. The electronics obviously did not know what to think of such a conflation of inputs.

“What are you two doing?” said a rather large nurse as she walked into the room. I sat on my pillow like a Buddha with my legs crossed. At the foot of the bed lay a decrepit old geezer doing sit-ups. Small motors huffed and puffed to keep up.

“Willard, stop,” I said.

We sat still, Willard holding his breath. He twisted his head and stared up and down the length of the tall steely woman. She was built like popcorn machine, but didn’t smell as nice.

Willard let his breath out loudly and turned back to look at me.

“I withdraw my offer,” he said.

“Which one of you is Mr. Griffin?” said the woman.

Willard and I pointed at each other.

She walked toward us and stopped next to Willard.

“I seem to remember you from somewhere,” she said airily to Willard. “Could it have been the Emergency Room?”

She walked up to my end of the bed. I gulped

“I know who you are,” she said. “I heard you read at the Library last Fall.”

“Uh huh,” I said.

A sarcastic smile came across her face. “Will you need any help undressing?” she asked.

“Oh, no,” I blurted out. “Why would you ever think so?”

She chuckled. “I’m a nurse. This new bed tells me everything.”

Had I read far enough in the brochure I would have discovered the bed had a built-in intercom. Willard hopped off the bed and headed for the door. The nurse watched him leave and then turned back to me.

“Abracadabra,” she said.

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[www.windsweptpress.com](http://www.windsweptpress.com)

*Disclaimer: My limited personal experience was with a Hill-Rom Versa Style Hospital Bed. Price \$13,250. Internet sale for \$8,500. The Synergy Air Elite Therapy Surface Mattress is priced separately. I do not know if my technical descriptions are accurate and they were obviously over stated. Also, I don’t really believe any of the models have an intercom. But I could be wrong.*