

And with those loving words, she was off ... to fight, perhaps to give all she had for ... that one ... last ... bargain. I stood there vowing that I would never give in to the awful addiction that had captured my mother's heart: The Eternal Bargain! I'd seen what it had done to our family: My father sneaking out at night to buy things that weren't on sale just because we needed them; My little brother wearing a snowsuit four sizes too big just because it was a bargain; Our entire house filled with knickknacks that no one could identify.

I swore that this would never happen to me. I stand here today as living testimony that you can overcome ... (*something in the audience catches her eye*) ... you can overcome ... (*she moves closer to an audience member*) ... Where'd you get that shirt? What'd you pay for it? What'll you take? No, really. I've got to have it. You want cash or check? No, really. I've got to have it!

END

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#102 - THE CHARGE UP YARDSALE HILL!

by Ken Bradbury

I didn't ask to go. It was not my idea. My Saturday mornings usually belong to me and Mom doesn't interfere but this was no normal Saturday morning ... and this is no normal mother. Some mothers are called to wrestle steers in the rodeo, others to repair nuclear bombs, or stomp alligators, or teach seventh graders, but nothing so tame would appeal to my mother. My mother is a Commando. A Yard Sale Commando. My grandmother must have dropped a "For Sale" sign on her head when she was still a young girl and she's never recovered.

Bulls react to waving capes. Mad dogs go crazy at the sight of water. Man-eating tigers lose their mind at the smell of red meat. For my mother, it takes just a simple sign that says: YARD SALE.

It had promised to be one of those Saturday mornings that I'd always dreamed of: no school, sleep 'till noon, call up a few friends ... just generally turn to mold, watching television and doing nothing. Then Mom flew into my bedroom, jerked off my covers and said, "Get up, (*your name*)! It's time you became a woman! Your first yard sale!"

What could I do? I just assumed that she'd lost her mind and could be dangerous. And after all, I could sleep in the car all morning while she picked through all the neighbors' stuff. Well, let me tell you, honey, there was no sleeping in this car. In the first place, she had packed it to the gills with four of her Commando friends. They'd trained together for years and each knew the moves of the other by heart. Our white Buick blasted off the launch pad at 6 A.M. sharp, wilting the grass and killing every sparrow within twenty yards.

And that look! That look in my mother's eyes! I'd never seen anything like it! Even my fourth-grade report card hadn't earned that sort of ... of ... craziness! "Mom," I said. "What's the matter?"

"In the yard sale game, (*your name*)," she sneered, "it's either crush or be crushed. This is the day you grow up, little girl!"

In science class they'd shown us videos of poisonous pythons and crazed polar bears. But close-up, this was more frightening. The early morning traffic was heavy but that made no difference to Mom. She just went around it, or under it, or over it. At the edge of town our Buick jumped completely over a troop of sleeping Boy Scouts and landed nose first at the foot of a mail carrier who quickly shot up to the top branches of an Elm tree. His oath to deliver mail through rain, snow and sleet had evidently not covered natural disasters such as my mother. I knew by the frightened look in his eyes that he recognized Mom's Buick on sight. A picture of it was taped to the inside of all mail carrier's bags with a sign that read, "Beware! Vicious woman!"

The poor lady who owned the house had just come out before breakfast to get her newspaper off the front walk when our Battleship Buick ground its teeth into her front curb. Before she could even bend down to get her paper, the Commandos had bought her wristwatch, hairnet, bathrobe, and had made several offers on her cup of coffee.

"Mom!" I screamed. "This is awful!"

"Quiet, sweetheart," she growled. "We're just getting warmed up. The real battles are still coming!" And off we shot like a heat-seeking missile through the suburbs. Occasionally we'd pass a carload of amateur yardsalers. You could tell the novices. They'd be sitting there reading the ads. "Hah!" sneered Mom's friend, Beatrice-of-the-Back-Seat. "Rookies! Look at 'em! A real Yarder don't need no newspaper. A real Yarder can smell a sale!"

Twelve of my sixteen ounces of Diet Pepsi splashed against passenger-side window as Mom took out an entire row of garbage cans. The four ladies cackled with evil glee as one Yard Sale after another was spied, then plundered. I'd heard tales ... the kind your older sister would tell you just before you went to sleep to make sure you have horrible nightmares ... stories about school girls who had come home to find that everything they loved had been bargained for and bought ... their Sunday dress, their Cocker Spaniel, their baby brother. Gone in a whiff of red tags.

At every stop, the Yard Sale Commandos' pattern of attack was the same. Mom would screech up to a curb and the four doors of

our old Buick would explode like an egg in a microwave. The Commandos would spread out, covering every yard within a two-block area, searching for the biggest bargains. When one was spotted, the Commando would reach down into regions unknown and pull out a small whistle, pitched so high that only other Commandos and deaf dogs could hear it. Then it would begin.

Offers were shouted-out with bullhorn volume, hands desperately grabbed cartons, prices dropped like lead underwear. I saw ... and I'm not lying ... I saw Wilma Waters roll on the ground for nearly two minutes, wrestling an enemy Commando for the possession of a 12 year old weed-eater! It was like All-star Wrestling with real blood. Stray dogs ran off in terror! Birds refused to fly! Houseplants wilted at the very sight! After the awful struggle, one woman would rise victorious from the cloud of dust and red tags, slap her money down on the card table and walk off with a weed-eater, leaving the loser to nurse her wounds and dream of returning to fight again,

We'd just pulled up to the last house on the block when THEY appeared around the corner. It was the Commandos most dreaded enemy ... The sale busters from (a nearby town). These gals had battle scars on their teeth! Gory-lookin' medallions hung from their purses, proclaiming their victory in past battles. Two had Purple Hearts! They were crammed into the rear of a 1962 Ford pickup truck. They chugged to a halt and on a signal heard only by them, slapped down the tailgate like a cargo door of an amphibious landing craft. They charged up the newly mowed lawn of a suburban duplex, completely destroying three yard-jockeys in their wake. My Mom's Commandos, although veterans themselves, quaked at the sight of these grizzled old warriors. "*(your name)*," said my mother. "I've lead a good life. I've got no regrets and I want you to know that I love you. But if I don't make it back from this one ..." She stopped, her throat choked with emotion.

"Yes, Mom?" I squealed.

"If I don't make it back. Tell your father ... tell him ..."

"What, Mom? Tell him what?"

"Tell him to water the dog. That man would forget his head if I didn't remind him."