

DISCLAIMER: If you are expecting the happy go lucky recounting of German boobs and satori-induced smiles of satisfaction, turn back now. The title of this discourse is ROCK BOTTOM. If it seems a bit dramatic, mind you, it's not a plea for sympathy, just an attempt at good, solid writing. I shall do my best not to embellish.

"We've hit rock bottom," a perennial favorite of mine as far as phrases go. I'm not sure if I picked it up from KT or KMCK, but its used only in the most sardonic fashion. Its been dropped while freeloading at a mansion eating delicious steaks, and while drinking fine scotch in the company of easy women [or Mike Roberts]. Unfortunately, in this situation, there is no we. I'm by my lonesome, and when I say "I've hit rock bottom," this time, it's not in jest.

The escapade began about four days ago. I was working as a deckhand, and our ship, the Pacific Star, was out on a wonderful [scuba] diving trip. Our biggest concern was entertaining our loco Latin American guests. Upon returning to land, inbetween recollections of silly sixth grade kissing games from the night before, I felt a swelling in my right knee. The pain was noticeable even after 6-8 beers, which should have been cause for alarm, but I acquiesced it, and tackled the 3 km uphill trek home, no problem.

The next day, an off day, was spent like most others. Sedating cups of coffee, quietude, some internet, some rain, and the company of my Bryson tome, read from my palatial balcony. My knee looked much improved, walking was effortless. I opted for the "wait it out" rather than "check it out" option, against the advice of my sexy librarian-turned-pharmacist friend. (She's so quiet, but I bet she screams like a mother fucker. I digress.) I drive my comrades to the bar, and retire to the couch. A voicemail informs me that I work tomorrow at 7 AM. Perfect for my refreshed state.

I rise early, ~530 AM, shower, shave, and dress. I'm looking and feeling good, but my knee has grown substantially overnight. Too timid to bail hours before departure, I figure I'll keep an eye on it. Two hours later, when I reach ole Enid [the boat I've been assigned to], walking about becomes pretty painful. I futilely douse my leg in Iodine (about a week too late), and figure I can relieve the pressure by squeezing some of the fluid out. I manage to painfully drain about 5 cc's through a pin-sized hole. I delude myself, thinking I've made a positive difference, but in reality, I've taken an eyedropperful out of a pint, and manage to push the once-contained fluid and bacteria into the further reaches of my right leg. I show it to boss #1 [asshole] who uselessly offers, "Keep it clean, Mate." Just prior to departuer, boss #2, Big Ross, assures me if things get worse, I can come home in the morning.

And, I go about my duties, chopping vegetables, serving tea and biscuits. When I can't stand for more than 10 minutes, and see my calf becomes flecked with red sploches, I decide I should show the skipper.

I show John my sore muscles, continuing to grow [I always wanted big calves!]. "i've got this infection thats giving me some pain."

He replies with a single word, "SHIT," and immediately calls Big Ross. "Ross, this deckie needs to see a doctor today. Not tomorrow. Remember that Kiwi? Charles? Yeah, the hospitalized one. Same exact thing."

Fuck.

So the guests snorkel about, happily, peacefully, not fearing for their lives and limbs. I am, literally. As I look at the turgid monstrosity (which now can't bear weight), I lose my oft-positive attitude. I want to keep my leg. Fuck the leg, I just want to live. John informs the passengers that we're headed back to Airlie to dump the sick cargo [me]. I should be there by 6, and with some prescription antibiotics, be AOK. John seems like he's seen and done enough for his words to be assuring, and despite a low-grade fever and the chills, I think, I'm goinna be OK.

We reach the port at 6:02, all the doctors in town close at 6. Off to Prosperpine Hospital, chauffeured by Ross himself. "I could see it from all the way down the dock. Looks pretty bad," he tells me.

"Yeah, I know."

We shoot the shit for 40 kms. When we arrive at the hospital, a stretcher is being loaded onto a helicopter, desintation, Mackay. "Tell them to wait. Mackay is where they do the amputation!"

"Please dont fuck with me ross, I'm a fragile man." The levity does in fact make me feel a drop better.

Mavin, a no-bullshit nurse runs the show here. Its quite impressive. She tells me it will be about an hour. There are some trauma patients ahead of me. A swollen knee doesn't seem all that bad now. "I totally understand, take your time," I add. She quietly speaks to her coworker "See? All Americans aren't assholes." USA! USA!

The doctor is young Asian dude. The long and short of it? "I'll give you some antibitoics. They probably won't work. If your leg starts turning black, if your fever gets too high, if you feel like absolute shit, or if you think you have sepsis, the infection in your bloodstream (trust me, you'll know), then come back immediately. Otherwise we'll see you Sunday for some intravenous antibiotics, maybe a few nights stay. I bet we see you Sunday. I really don't think these'll do anything, but take them anyway. See you soon."

Thanks. Fuck. I don't want sepsis.

I decide that lying feverish and infected on Thommo's [the man who owns the house where I've been squatting] couch is the definition of overstaying my welcome, so I opt for a bed at Ross's. He tells me no one is staying there, it'll be a good spot to rest and convalesce. I'm here now. My only company are the plethora of flies and the stench of my balls. There's no soap here. The house could be gorgeous, its just hideously unkempt. Its like a busted girl with a really good bone structure and a lot of potential. She just needs to lose 5 lbs, dye her hair, get some pro-activ, and get a new wardrobe.

I spend the days alone, waiting for Sunday, I get up every 4 hours to fetch my drugs, which I'm convenced are lowering my blood pressure. I haven't stood up without nearly passing out. Each time the blackness fills my field of vision, I think "Shit, this is the one." Been sleeping 75% of the time. A combo of fever, solitude, and drugs is leading me down the trail of delerium. There are 2 TV stations, one is in French. A broken DVD Player. I make strange noises to see if they'll hurt my ears. After every point in the tennis match, I let out a high pitched "OH SHIT NIGGA!" or scream "NOPE!" I've tried to be creative with food. I have only bread, jam, cheese, crackers, and DELICIOUS COOKIES. I've eaten nearly the entire cookie box and a solid pound of cheese. My air mattress hurts my back, I can't turn on my right side. Th couch is just too small to lay on. Ross brought home a Tawaiianese girl. I thought it was a plaything for me, till I smelled myself and realzied she was his. I've hit rock bottom.

But hey, no sepsis. Yet.

#### SUNDAY MORNING:

My head continues to hang. I awake to find my sheet covered in blood, neutrophils, and leukocytes. Combined with the back pain induced by this shitty air mattress, a nice way to start the day. I keep telling myself I'm almost better, but one view from above confirms otherwise. I've gone from grapefruit to an orange-sized kneecap, the hues of both my skin and the discharge resembling a tequila sunrise. Still feeling considerable pain while standing. As I strip down for a shower [perhaps a rinse would be fairer], I examine my nude body in the mirror; my withering frame carries 7-10 less lbs. One word orbits my brain: depression. There is a phone locked in Ross's room that is playing an infectiously annoying jingle every 2 minutes. I watch life tick away in 2 minute intervals, repeatedly remarking how little I've done in the last 120 seconds.

I'm almost happy to be at the hospital. How very macabre. I think I just want closure. Ross and the Asian had beers on the way here. He's far from handsome, so resorts to plan B. Pump her full of liquor till she turns red, smiles, and begs to fuck. She trades her vagina and cleaning services for room, board, and liquor. God pray he doesn't have me on a similar payment plan. Though he bears no resemblance, it's definitely a Lumberg-fucked-her scenario.

Hopefully, when this charade is over, I remember how to find the beauty in things. Did I mention my computer is now a \$1500 paperweight?

At the hospital, Mavin told me I'm looking much better, cleaned me up, squeezed out lots of shit. I'm going to live, AND keep my leg. With a new lease on life, I take the bus home and find the beauty of things once more.