

## Gorge

By Heidi Kure

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Standing in front of my new twelve speed, Limited Edition, mountain bike, I heard it whisper "Let's do it". Without hesitation, I did and launched from the garage onto the gravelled country road. As I sped down hill, with sun and shadows flickering through the trees, strobing the path in front of me. I was at a rave. My Birthday. Invitation only.

It was a perfect day, not too hot with a cool breeze blowing through my hair. I was free. I am the man. I had cycled this path many times before, but this was a high-speed bike and it was powerful. The faster I pedalled, the more amazing I felt. Speed racer and dare devil extraordinaire. My own personal Tour de France. Even if I was not in France. It felt like I was.

I released my hands from the handle bars and held my arms up to embrace the sky. Mind open and eyes shut. Soaking up that moment in believing that anything is possible. Including hitting a tree head on whilst not wearing a helmet, and tumbling down a steep gorge. As I did.

I remember screaming as I hit every rock, branch and tree on my way down. I think I invented new forms of profanity or maybe I was speaking in tongues. I didn't feel the pain until I hit rock bottom. Rather the pain from my bottom and every other part of my body hit me. I had finally come to a stop.

I started screaming again. "What the F just happened and where is my bike?" I look up and could see the steepness from where I fell and I looked down to see that at least I hadn't landed in the stream. I was still in one piece. Or was I? I hurt all over. This wasn't supposed to happen on my perfect day, during my Tour De France or wherever the hell I was. The gorge was not the finish line that I was aiming for.

I looked down at my legs to see my new skinny jeans were torn. To my horror, my knee was gashed and bleeding. As for my favourite shirt that I was wearing? It was no longer a shirt. I looked at my wrist and questioned the strange piece of jewellery that had replaced my new watch. I was now wearing my bicycle wheel. As I yanked the bicycle wheel from my badly bruised and bleeding wrist, I paid a silent homage to my shirt. My girlfriend loved that shirt. I held my hand to my head. Yes, my forehead was bleeding too.

"What just happened to me? Is this the gorge? Am I dead? If I am dead, is this heaven or hell?" I knew it was neither because I had been down to the gorge many times before. Just not this section. I wasn't dead because I could feel pain. "Did someone push me down here or did I really hit a tree?" I tried to recollect what had just happened, along with my feelings.

I felt angry. Not sure if I was angry at myself, at someone else or because I hadn't won the Tour de France. Instead, I was the last one in at the Tour de Gorge. I was hurting in more than one way. I limped my way to the edge of the stream, grasping my current reality, along with my damaged wheel. There was no way that I could get out of this gorge alone.

I pulled off what remained of my shirt sleeve, and using my wheel as a sort of crutch, I knelt down to the stream, as if being given a knighthood. The water was ice cold and sounded more like a symphony than a rave. I dipped my shirt sleeve into the water and almost fell in when I noticed fish dancing through the rocks. This was their party, not mine. I wiped the blood from my forehead, then tied my hair back with it. I scream again. Note to self: Should have got a haircut like Mom suggested.

Staggering to my feet, I did a visual on the area. It was rocky, dense, and green. I spotted an opening in some bushes and decided to set up there. It was near the stream, with a good view around me. I remember hoping that this spot wasn't where some wild animal sleeps. I stared at the stream. I would need help getting out of this gorge so for now I would use this as my camp. I was trying to remember episodes of Survivor Man, that I watched every weekend. Now I would have to go into survivor mode. The basics I needed were a fire, tools, weapons, water, and food. No to eating bugs. Never that hungry.

I pulled several spokes from my broken bicycle wheel. This was an expensive wheel but I had to stay in survivor mode. I may be able to spear a fish from the stream, even though I hate fish. Or I could use the spokes as weapons. Hoping that I wouldn't have to, on both.

I shouted out "I'm glad I have some weapons!". Just in case the people that have been throwing their beer cans and bottles around the stream were nearby, they would hear me. I am 5 foot 8 with long hair and a slight build. Yes, I may need a "just in case" weapon or two. This wasn't my party anymore but someone had obviously had one here.

Now, I was wearing a one sleeved shirt with blood on it, a bandana around my head, was wet, cold and the evening was fast approaching. Although I had walked along this stream before, being stuck there at night made me uncomfortable. I needed to make a fire for warmth, to hopefully be rescued and just in case I was camped where a wild animal sleeps. I hobbled to find some dry twigs to build a fire. Reaching into the back pocket of my jeans, only to find that it no longer existed. My pocket along with my lighter was ripped off during my fall.

I never really liked smoking. I had given it up, keeping my lighter as a sort of status symbol. Like the status symbol of my new bike, that I also lost. More profanity.

Then in the distance, I heard someone calling my name. I couldn't see who it was through the thick bushes and trees. That I had taken my glasses off before riding my bike, made it harder to see and to be able to work out which direction the voice was coming from. The voice was that of a woman. Through my blurred vision, I could make out that she was slowly approaching.

“Stop right there” I shouted. “What do you want? Do you drink beer?” I agree that was an odd question but it may have explained all the empty beer containers that were strewn around. I managed to stand up on my one good leg and raised my broken wheel at her. Minus some spokes.

“I have a weapon and I am not afraid to use it. What are you doing here? This is my camp and you are not welcome. Please leave. I am sure that people are looking for me. So, you had better clear off and go drink your beer somewhere else.”

Through blurred vision and now, tears, I could make out a tall slender woman with long blonde hair. She looked pretty enough but you can never judge a book by its’ cover my mom used to say. This strange woman could be under cover and be a pretty, beer drinking, murderer that wants to take over my camp and steal my wheel. I could see that with one hand she was holding her long blonde hair over her shoulder in front of her. I thought that she might be hiding her cell phone and saying “I found him. Now I am going to kill him and drink more beer”. She was holding something in her other hand. It could have been a bottle opener or a knife. As she advanced towards me, stumbling over the rocks and undergrowth, I remember thinking why was she wearing high heels?

“Stay back” I shouted again. “Or you may tear that pretty dress of yours. I may tear it with one of my spikes.” Meaning the spokes, that I held with bravado in my other hand.

The woman kept moving towards me, as I stood my ground. As she advanced towards me, I saw that she was wearing a beautiful pink floral dress, flowing in the breeze. For a brief moment, I thought maybe I had died when I fell into the gorge and this was not a woman but a vision from heaven. Then I refocused, thinking I have done some bad stuff and smoked cigarettes, so she can’t be from heaven.

“I could kill you. Who do you think you are?” she screamed holding her fists above her head. She said more but by then I was so sore, hungry and tired, that the rest just sounded muffled. I suddenly went into survivor mode, realizing she wasn’t an angel but she may be the one who drank all that beer. Again, I shouted “I have weapons. I have these spikes to stab you and a tube to hit you and strangle you”. I forgot to mention that I managed to pull the inner tube out of my broken bicycle wheel. It would sure hurt if I hit someone with it.

The woman ran at me just as I fell to the ground. I hit her with my fists shouting “I am hungry and I don’t want to eat fish from the stream. I can’t see to spike you because I left my glasses at home. I need to make a fire but I lost my lighter. Please don’t kill me. I promise I won’t drink your beer.”

The woman released the grip on her hair and I noticed that she had a lit cigarette in her other hand. “I can help you. I have a lighter”. As she folded her dress beneath her and sat down next to me, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a lighter. Together we lit my bundle of

twigs and made a small fire. She was a beautiful mysterious woman in a flowing pink floral dress, but she was not an angel or a vision. She was my mom.

“I could kill you for that. You have to stop running away like that. Your Dad was worried about you. We all were. Your sister and friends are all at your party wondering where you went off to on your new bike.”

Then suddenly, what looked like a huge bear, came bursting through the bushes. But bears don't talk. It was angry and frightening. “Where the hell have you been? I've been looking all over the place for you. I even called the police.” It was a man. A very large man with a large beard and a big voice.

“Stop shouting at him, can't you see he's injured?” my mom shouted back.

“I don't care that he is injured. He shouldn't have taken off on that new bike I bought him. I hadn't finished putting it together and tightening the wheels. He is a careless and ungrateful son”.

Through my experience as a survivor man, I became embolden and brave. I stood up on my one good leg, using mum for support and shouted back. “I am not your son and you are not my dad. And while I am at it, she is not my sister.” (I'll get to that later)

It was then the man lunged at me with his huge bear size hands. My mom had become survivor woman, having walked down into the gorge in high heel shoes, and grabbed his hairy arm. As the man tried to break away, she pulled him away from me and they began to wrestle. They waved their arms a lot and I think they were fighting but they may have been hugging. I really couldn't tell without my glasses. When the fight was over, they both came back to my camp, where I stood on one leg and holding what was left of my wheel weapon. The battle was over. The victory to Mom and me, as the man began to cry.

No further injuries happened that day. My step dad apologised for shouting while we put out the fire and left my camp. I rode on his back all up the path that led out of the gorge and all the way up the hill to home. I said I was sorry and promised to not run away again and to get better grades at school. I even promised to be nicer to my step sister. Mom carried my trusty bicycle wheel in one hand, holding another cigarette in her other. Seems like the only other injuries that day, was that of my bruised ego.

When we arrived home, we were greeted with hurrah's, thank God's, Birthday songs, laughter and hugs. No hugs for me because I was still in “ouch” mode. My Birthday party finally got into full swing. With real strobe lights. Dad was super cool and said the bike was insured and said he was glad that it was the bike that broke and not me, because he loved me. Mom chain smoked cigarettes and drank wine, not beer. My step sister called me a dork, while she handed me my glasses. I opened presents, danced without my favourite shirt, broke up

with my girlfriend and everyone at my party gorged on cake. After all the guests left, I fell asleep on the sofa, dreaming about the Tour de France.

Life can be a ride. Just don't gorge.