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For April 5, 2018 Write Club

Theme: Run

RUN

I ran as fast as I could through the woods. Uphill, no path, in the dark, 10 o’clock at night, pitch black darkness, heart pounding and looking over my shoulder with terror every few seconds to make sure no one was following me.

I was frantically trying to run as fast as I could from what I understood to be immediate and fatal danger, certain I was about to be captured and killed.

Okay. Time out. Why was I running through the woods so sure of death by murder? What the heck was going on, you might ask?

Let’s rewind to a few hours earlier in the evening, when I was hanging out with my girlfriends, in the dormroom of our friend Kathryn. It was my junior year at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. Our plan for the night was to join our friends down the hill and through the woods for a birthday bonfire party at the edge of the Kokosing river.

But first—my girlfriends and I took an obscene amount of gravity bong hits, as you do before attending a college bonfire party. For those of you who don’t know, gravity-bong hits deliver a powerful punch and should not be taken in the rapid-fire succession style that we did that night. Suffice it to say—we immediately got super high, in a rather incapacitating way.

From there, we stumbled out of the dorm and into the nearby woods and walked along a thin dirt path in near-darkness, and as we clung to each other for support, ever-theatrical Kathryn began a paranoid litany that included rhetorical questions such as, “You guys! Don’t you just feel like a murderer or rapist could jump out and kill us at any moment?”

Now, if we hadn’t just smoked a crazy amount of pot, we might have just laughed it off and said “Whatever, Kathryn!” but, the level of high that we already were enabled this fantasy of Kathryn’s to absorb into our psyches, and seem like a more realistic likelihood. These notions began to firmly embed themselves into our minds, fertilizing the seed of fear within our hearts.

I could sense all of our discomfort, but being the nice, meek hippie girls we were, we just laughed nervously like “heh, heh...yeah!”

Unfortunately, by the time we arrived at the party — bonfire roaring, and tons of people partying — Kathryn’s words had completely shaken me to the core. I was totally freaked out, heart racing, shaking and in a total daze. This was not an example of the blissful experience that smoking pot usually was for me, but instead the more rare case of total and complete paranoia.

So, as my friends at the party began to approach me, addressing me excitedly by my last name “Leber” as they did back then — I found myself becoming very, very afraid. Everything became distorted, and everything everyone said had an ironic, dark and threatening bent to it. Like, “Hi Leber! So good to SEE you!”

As more and more people approached me, my heart began racing faster and I felt more and more overwhelmed. I began to retreat back to the direction of the woods where I came from, trying to get my bearings, and contemplating the idea of leaving — mere minutes after arriving.

Some guy friends of mine were hanging out in the woods, and when they saw me standing there, they approached me enthusiastically, saying, “Hey Leber! Where you BEEN?” in that foreboding way that everyone seemed to be speaking, with the maniacal look of exuberant killers.

I tried to get away from them, scared, and my friend Damian put his arm around me in a way that I think he meant to be protective— I was probably stumbling around a bit and looking pretty out of sorts—but his benevolent gesture morphed into a frolicsome swinging of me round in circles as I tried to get away — surely he was trying to disorient me and so lead me back to the party to my certain doom, as he said, “Whoa, Leber! Whatcha doing? Where ya going?” Surely this was but mockery before the kill.

I finally managed to break from his grip, and started walking quickly away. Once I gained a bit of ground, I just started running.

Which brings us back to the beginning of my story—me, running uphill, terrified, through the dense tangle of trees in the dark, looking back over my shoulder every few seconds for a band of murderous friends on my tail.

After outpacing my assassins, running for an unknown amount of time, I reached the edge of our college campus and stopped to take in my surroundings. I found myself in a classic horror film scene, behind a brick building with the erie and ever-present humming of electricity, blinking fluorescent lights, dumpsters and a campus maintenance guy who I was certain must be part of the plot. I crouched down in wait at the edge of the woods until he started walking in the other direction. I took that moment to bolt as fast as I could out of the woods, and scrambled towards campus, praying he didn’t see me.

From there, I sprinted all the way back to my dorm room, immediately locking the door behind me. Out of breath and heart pounding, not knowing what to do next, I decided to check my voicemail. I found a few messages from some of my girlfriends, their messages full of concern for me and wondering where I went. I was convinced that this was all part of the plot, and, patted myself on the back for knowing better than to fall into their trap by calling them back.

After pacing frantically in my room for a few minutes, I finally decided what the next logical step was. I did what every person from every horror film decides to do for absolutely no good reason before they get murdered, and, that is: to take a shower.

I couldn’t lock the bathroom door, so I showered with the shower curtain open to make sure I couldn’t be attacked by surprise, full freak-out still in effect, peeking out every few seconds to be doubly sure.

When I eventually made it back to my room, I locked the door, put on my pajamas, and climbed into bed, hiding and shaking under the covers. While I honestly don’t remember how the night concluded, I am pretty sure that my sweet friend and roommate came home eventually and found me in my frightened under-the-covers state, and comforted and reassured me as I shared my story with her until I finally could fall asleep.

Flash forward to the next day, sometime in the late afternoon on Sunday, when I finally felt brave enough to leave my room in search of food and reality. I had mostly recovered from the night before, though still deeply humbled from my paranoia-filled evening of terror, and contemplating what to tell people if they asked me.

While walking down the main campus path towards town, my friend Jen approached me, and asked me what happened to me the night before, that I disappeared before she could say hi.

I took a deep breath and decided to tell her the truth. “Well, you’re not gonna believe this,” I said,“but, I wound up smoking too much pot and I was convinced that you were all plotting to kill me, so, I ran away and hid in my room the rest of the night.” I looked at her sheepishly, bracing myself for her reaction.

To this, Jen put her arm around me and started walking me in the direction of the one local tavern in our tiny college town. Shaking her head slowly, and with a knowing smile on her face, she said, “Oh, Leber. Let’s go get a drink.”

Alas, there would be many random times over the following years when I would experience a similar strand of menacing paranoia as a result of smoking pot, but none would ever compete with the time when I thought all of my friends were plotting to kill me.

Yet, for that one particular lazy Sunday evening in Gambier, Jen and I walked off into the sunset, safe for another day.