



The Hairpin

Mount Defiance at Starvation Ridge



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*by Arianna Rebolini*

Everything considered, the whole experience couldn't have gone much better.

We were, after all, trying to be more proactive in our summer. Emily and I were newly single and acutely aware of our need to be doing Fun Things, but by July those Fun Things had manifested mostly as laziness in varied locations. We spent our days lying on couches, lying on lawns, and lying on beaches. On one of those supine afternoons, we got to talking about how rarely we took advantage of the many opportunities that lay beyond the Portland city limits. Three years ago I'd moved to the Pacific Northwest to be "more in touch with nature" and in those three years I'd been on exactly two hikes and one interrupted camping excursion. We worked ourselves into a huff over this lamentable truth: one's grand notions of relocation never

totally align with the inevitable reality because one always seems to get sucked into the drudgery of routine no matter where one resides. But weren't our recent breakups the necessary jolts out of such drudgery? And weren't we young and relatively free of responsibility and, for the most part, capable? Hadn't we agreed that we were saying *yes* to life?

So we decided to go on a hike.

We did a bit of research (which is to say we inquired with Wendy, the beloved instructor of our Lower Body & Abs fitness class) and we settled on a summit of Mt. Defiance at Starvation Ridge. It did not matter that both names sounded like made-up horror movie locations from *The Hills Have Eyes* and it did not matter that Wendy quickly retracted this first suggestion with a second email, warning us that this was "one of the most strenuous hikes in Oregon" and that, on second thought, we definitely should not attempt it. It definitely did not matter that it was 12 miles in length and 4900 feet in elevation, or that the writers of PortlandHikers.org rated it as "Difficult (and that's only because we don't have anything harder)." It didn't matter! Please! I'd hiked twice in Oregon (not to mention the five or so trails I'd braved in the unforgiving wilderness of Long Island) and Emily walked pretty regularly. In fact she hardly ever took the bus anywhere. So, obviously, we were settled.

We stocked up at Trader Joe's on the morning of the hike, filling our backpacks with Cliff bars, water bottles, and two pounds of banana chips. I packed a notebook and a novel, so certain was I that this would be a perfect opportunity to really commune with the muses. The drive to the trailhead took a little over an hour and we spent the trip "ooh"-ing and "aah"-ing at the scenery as it unfolded in front of us. When we got out of the car we were already in earshot of the first waterfall. "This is the life!" we said. "How are we not doing this *all the time*???" we wondered. The sky was clear and we were filled with optimism. *Nature!* With self-satisfied eagerness, we began.



We were panic-stricken around hour eight. Having successfully summited (wherein “successfully” means “stopping once to cry, walking the last mile backwards and sideways to ease the back pressure, and — finally — so help me — stumbling to the top”), and having decided, unwisely, to take a different route back down (because — based on the map we vaguely recalled but never printed — the trail was called a *loop* and returning the same way we’d arrived seemed silly), and having noticed a perfect storm of alarm (the leveling off our decline, the distant sound of thunder, and the sudden proximity of Mt. Hood, which, for the ease of perspective, had appeared from the peak of Mt. Defiance to be the size of my thumb and was separated from us by a river), we ultimately found ourselves at a fork in the trail, ready to admit what we’d quietly suspected for far too long: we were very, very lost. We clutched our non-smart phones — Emily’s receiving no service, mine with dying battery — and agreed I would have to be the one to make the call.

“911, where is your emergency?”

“Well, that’s the thing, I don’t know? Which sort of *is* the emergency?”

“Sorry?”

“No, no, *I’m* sorry. My friend and I went for a hike but we must have taken a wrong turn on the way back and we’ve been walking for a few hours and I just have no idea where we are so I’m hoping maybe you can walk me

through this? Because it's getting late and it sounds like it's about to start storming, and I'm not sure — “

“Okay, what is your name?”

“Arianna.”

“And where did you begin the hike?”

“Starvation Creek. The Starvation-Defiance loop.” (To reiterate, these are the real names of real locations.)

“What sort of tools do you have on you?”

“Um, a pocket knife? And, I don't know if this is relevant, but we found walking sticks, like really big walking sticks? We could probably fend off maybe a smaller animal with them, but not a bear or anything.”

“I ... don't think you'll have to fight any bears.”

“Are you sure, though?”

“I'm fairly sure. How about a compass, a map?”

I looked at the scene as it was laid out in front of me and winced.

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“Banana chips. We have banana chips.”

It turned out that banana chips, though delicious, were unfortunately insufficient tools in the operator's mind (and not [if we're going to split hairs] technically “tools” at all). After giving her the details of my car, where we'd parked, and which direction we'd headed in before finding ourselves so astray, I was told to expect a return phone call from the sheriff, who would be sent out to find us within a half hour.

This seemed a bit much even in my desperate state. The sheriff? *THE* sheriff? Wasn't there someone in a lesser position who should be relegated to the job of locating naïve, scared, but, realistically, barely-in-danger city girls? Did this mean we were actually in more danger than I initially suspected? I considered the possibility that my notion of a sheriff, so thoroughly based in spaghetti western tropes, was not entirely accurate and tried to shrug it off. I walked in circles around Emily, every few seconds checking my phone to see the battery level.

"You know, activating it like that is actually going to make the battery run out faster," Emily warned me, her mouth full.

I sat down next to her and placed the phone on the ground in front of me. "Stop eating our only source of sustenance."

While the thunder continued in the distance, the sky above us, though dimming, remained clear. The temperature rapidly dropped and a half hour passed with no call. I spent the time scouting possible areas of shelter. We were surrounded by pretty dense brush, and I imagined that, between the two of us, Emily and I could fashion a respectable lean-to. I pictured myself burrowing under a pile of leaves and twigs. I'm going to make it, I thought. *I'm a survivor.* As I was envisioning myself bravely crawling out of my imaginary fortress into the glaring morning sun, I heard the low rumbling of a motor. I jumped up and ran towards the sound, almost meeting the oncoming all-terrain vehicle head-on.

"Are you the sheriff?" I yelled to the driver as he rolled to a stop.

He was not. He was Terry.

Terry was, by my estimation, in his early 60s and resembled a sort of lumberjack-styled Santa Claus. He was a hefty man, rugged, with a flowing head of white hair and a head-to-toe camouflage get-up. Born and raised in the region, he'd swapped hiking for four-wheeling decades prior and was very familiar with the trails. This sort of thing happened all the time, he told us. City kids come in and don't realize how quickly the land changes around them. "That same trail you walk up is a new trail when you're walking back down!" he explained.

I nodded solemnly. Wise words for sure, and I made a mental note to jot it down when I returned to civilization.

“Well, you girls are about an hour drive from your car, at least,” Terry continued, “and there’s no way you’re making that walk.”

I resisted the urge to defend my clearly lacking capabilities. “Is there an outlet closer?” I asked. “Somewhere that we could just try to hitchhike?”

Terry laughed in a way that could only be described as a hoot and slapped the seat behind him. “You’re hitchhiking right now, sweetheart!”

Standing cold in a thin Hanes undershirt and shorts, glancing at Emily with her hand in the ever-diminishing banana chip bag, I accepted this as our new plan. Terry explained that we were to ride with him to the closest campsite, at which point he would hand us over to his friend Callie, who had a car and could drive us to the trailhead. We used my phone to call Callie, and Terry — bless his soul — offered me his coat. He tried to allay our fears (“Don’t worry, I’m not one of those rapists or anything,” he insisted in the least assuring way) and I called 911 again to tell them thanks, but never mind! We’d found Terry.

We climbed onto the seat of the ATV, Emily holding onto Terry and myself holding onto her. The seat was not meant to fit three people, and I spent much of the exhilarating and terrifying ride teetering off the edge, imagining myself tumbling off into the dust behind them. Any conversation that Emily tried to make (of which there was plenty — Emily’s capacity for social function in the face of anxiety far surpasses mine) was lost on me. I heard hardly anything over the wind that was whipping my face, and I am grateful for this fact if only because it means I will never have to know for sure whether or not Terry actually did attempt what would have certainly been a sexist joke involving cavemen and “their women.”

When we got to the campsite, Callie was already waiting. We pulled up next to the driver’s seat window.

“Got some girls for ya!” Terry said.

Callie was unamused. I meekly waved.

“Well, let’s get a move on, LeAnn needs to be back by ten,” she said, gesturing at the teenaged girl in the passenger seat.

“Yeah, *by ten*,” LeAnn reiterated, glaring at the ill-prepared city girls responsible for her ruined Friday night. A goatee-d boy sitting behind her squeezed her shoulder in commiseration.

We bid Terry farewell and hopped off the ATV in a stream of gratitude and apologies that continued into Callie’s backseat. We spent the hour-long drive back to my car slowly warming up to each other. Emily asked LeAnn about her big weekend plans. Callie and I bonded over waiting tables. LeAnn informed us that Jeff, the goatee-d boy, who maintained a not unsettling silence throughout the entirety of the trip, had just graduated from high school. We offered our congratulations and he nodded with a smile. We listened mostly to Kid Rock, though LeAnn did interrupt it to play us a song we later identified as “Rocking the Beer Gut” by Trailer Choir — a song she confidently and correctly predicted we would enjoy, if we really listened to the lyrics. When we pulled into the trailhead parking lot, we offered Callie all of the cash we had and promised we’d come in to visit her at her restaurant. Emily collapsed open-armed on the hood of my car and I unlocked the doors, thinking I’d never again be so happy to see a rundown and worn-out Toyota Corolla.

Three weeks later, sitting with Emily in the lounge chairs of our favorite teashop, I received a text from an unknown number:

“Hello, this is Terry, I go to tell people my story, I say, I was coming down the corner and I saw these two girls, and I have to help them, and they say, yeah, sure, nice one, they think I’m lying, but I guess that’s life. Anyway, bye.”

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Arianna Rebolini

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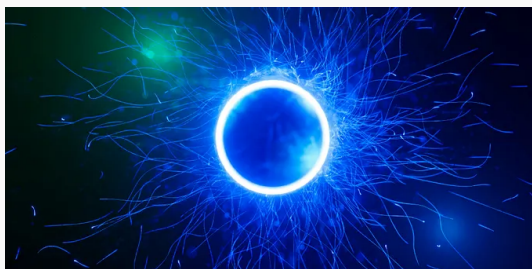


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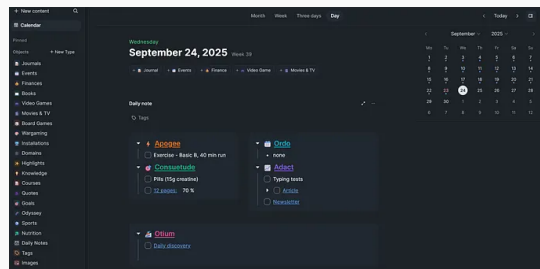
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