

...AKA: *Failing... Falling Actually*

Personal Narrative by Ira Pace, English 101

It was silent. Then, all the noise came back, frantic cries and questions. Yet I could only hear a faint ringing, a muffled voice of concern breaching the pain.

We always did the same thing each Saturday. Wake up around 6:00 am and groggily find my bike shoes. Reach blindly into the pantry for some crackers and a few fruit-by-the-foot—always a must for mountain bike adventures. I finish gathering my provisions. The time is around 6:30, and I am still so tired I mumble inaudibly to myself.

The cell phone's chirp pierces my zombie like state. It's my mountain bike trainer.

"You got everything?"

"Yeah, I think so," I answer half asleep.

"I'm right outside. Let's hit the trail before the horseback riders are out."

The road winds and twists. I love the mountain scene in Dupont State Forest. Bouncing down the road, with the occasional Fall Out Boy song mixed with some old school rap, we hit the unpaved road. Long forgotten by most people, this area is like my Fortress of Solitude. This clearly is the road less travelled.

Unloading our gear and checking each tire, chain, and camelback as we go... fast forward some: the air is cool, whooshing by my ears. The light is sparse. Trees shade the ground below them, with rays of light cutting through the leaves. It's the same image every time we hit this trail. I know the curves, the climbs, the downhill better than anyone, but my mind blanks when we get to the jumps. Today, I think I have no reservations. After the strenuous climb, my legs ache as they do each time we climb this Goliath. Littered with leaves, stumps and boulders, it is, in my mind, the AgroCrag from Global Guts. I tend to exaggerate a bit.

We stop at the top for some water, a small snack, and to take in the sounds of nature. A bird, not so far off, sings eagerly awaiting a response. A few squirrels tussle in the leaves, and a small stream babbles about something carefree. At the bottom, the waterfall beckons to me with its hypnotic roar.

This is the part where my courage breaks down. Months of crashing, wiping out, or backing down from these jumps have plagued me to the point of annoyance. These are not the ordinary small hills I had mastered within the first week. Perpetual Mt. Everest's loom from jump to jump. The five to ten foot jump would either land me on a new boulder or lay me down in some dead leaves near a tree.

"You got this." I say to myself.

"No, you're gonna crash again."

"Pfffft." In defiance of my negative side, I retort.

Eerily, the forest grows quiet. No more song birds. My coach, standing, cocky, at the bottom, looks to me as if I am just going to walk this out.

"As if."

Down I go. It seems to take hours as I descend. The whooshing returns, and my bike's shocks creak with every bounce. My burning muscles will my bike downhill.

First jump, as usual, is picturesque, one of those BMX images that make front cover of *Mountain Bike Magazine*. Second jump, I waver, as always, but it's not bad. Space and time begin to bend. I can hear my heart beating louder than my favorite band's bass drum. I feel the fear explode throughout my body, and I get ready. The third and final jump is from a small boulder, smaller than the rest, but to land short means hitting a fallen tree. Too long, however, and I will be colliding with a tree I have met so many times before.

I pick up speed; I know I am going too slowly. Two feet away and there is nothing I can do. I fly in the air in slow motion.

“I’m gonna make it.”

The sound of my bike catching the fallen tree is the last thing I remember.

Waking up less than a minute later, the white hot sunlight (or the immense pain in my head) hurts my eyes. The leaves and dirt taste gritty, and they smell like my wet dog. My bike is ten feet away from me, tires still spinning in reminder of my wreck.

“Whaaa?... What happened?” I manage to spit out with gulps of water in between.

“You had the jump, until your back tire caught the tree.” My trained replied. His voice cannot hide the concern.

The pain was blinding, demoralizing, and unending. The next run a week later, concussion and all, I conquered the beast.