

absolutely the most drunk we ever were in our lives

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Lush mountainsides, roaming rivers, intricate canals, lines of cyclists, pure Swiss chocolate, medieval castles, sweet smelling pastries — this is what comes to mind when I reflect on my abroad experience thus far. All the typical clichés apply: “picturesque, once-in-a-lifetime, changes you,” etc. Moments, on a day-to-day basis, are vivid, surreal, rarely resembling anything even remotely similar to my “old life,” as I’ve already come to think of it. My “new life” moves fast, *really fast*, and it doesn’t stop moving. It’s always on to the next stop, the next site to take pictures, the next expensive restaurant to complain about, the next bottle of wine to drown in. The next opportunity for some classic bourgeois indulgence, if you will. But then again why would I have it any other way? For me, a striking, vaguely muscular twenty-year-old male experiencing the luxuries and ambitions of his physical prime, the pace *was* the point.

And in reality there’s a certain charm to being a vaguely muscular twenty-year-old in his physical prime who is also, according to at least one non-related female, striking. You feel the need to constantly ask yourself — *what can I get away with? How invincible am I? How far can I push this thing?* And you think that about literally *everything*. At least, until you, for some reason or other, fail. Until you actually do push whatever that thing is a bit too far. But until that happens there’s only one thing to think about failure happening — it won’t. And it certainly won’t *to me*. I had, up to this point anyways, already conquered the Viking fjords of Norway, dealt with language barriers and bizarre transit systems, made friends with a variety of foreigners, and, at least by my own estimations, contributed a great deal to the effort for world peace. Europe, I was coming to feel, was easy. Being a tourist was easy. Motivating yourself to move a million miles per hour, perhaps purely for the sake of adventure, was easy.

And I felt that way until the first weekend of October 2017.

Unsurprisingly, few events were more anticipated for my friend Phil and me this semester than our trip to Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany. Every picture and video we’d seen had made the event look like the greatest party in the world — tens of thousands of people gathering to eat, drink, and enjoy a massive festival complete with shops and rides, the whole lot. Phil may have put our anticipation best:

“It’s crazy to know that this will absolutely be the most drunk we ever get in our lives.”

For two vaguely muscular twenty-year-olds in their physical primes, at least one of whom has previously been described as striking, nothing sounded better.

We knew going in that the trip was to be our most ambitious yet. We were committed to doing it for the cheapest amount possible (which obviously wasn’t cheap at all), and that meant we’d be spending thirteen hours on a train each way to get between Copenhagen and Munich. It also

meant we'd be sharing a tiny tent at a pre-paid campsite in the woods thirty minutes from the festival grounds. Every extra dollar we had was for beer and whatever else we needed to survive.

So that Thursday Phil and I arrived at the central station with plenty of time before our train was to leave. We grabbed a coffee, hit the ATM, talked to the information desk about what exactly we'd be doing, and were pretty much set to go. We'd need to transfer two times to get to Munich, just follow what it says on our tickets, easy enough. Then after an hour or so of waiting we boarded the train and grabbed a couple open seats.

"This isn't so bad," I stated blankly.

"Yeah, pretty easy honestly," Phil added.

And we, at that point, having moved all of zero inches from Copenhagen, truly believed ourselves to be in the clear. That, and we, as vaguely muscular twenty-year-olds deeply aware that we were in our physical prime, were already more than ready to party. So of course we went ahead and ate the weed edibles we'd just bought for the trip, a whole one each. No one was going to accuse us of going halfway on *anything*.

And for a minute, it was perfect. Another great trip was underway. And we were high, so that was awesome.

Then after an hour or so the conductor instructed us on where to switch trains. We just needed to follow the crowd, most of which was also headed to Germany. And we did. We, again, boarded and sat.

"See, easy."

The two of us exhaled before noticing that this train was substantially more crowded than the previous one.

"Excuse me, I believe you're in our seats," a woman told Phil. Confusedly, we got up and started walking.

"Where are our seats?" Phil asked me.

The train then began to move. Phil and I and the luggage waddled and stumbled through car after car until we found another two empty seats. Just to be told that they were also reserved. Actually, *everything was fucking reserved*. Turns out trains like this are regularly overbooked and we needed to reserve a seat for an extra nine euros when we purchased the ticket. That meant, for the next five hours, we'd need to sit on the floor in the nearest decently-sized space, which was, because of course, right next to the bathroom. That was a lot of time for a lot of people to take a lot of shits, and for us to just sit there.

Then an overhead announcement — ‘unser ZL ist...’ we waited, no English translation. *No fucking English translation?* We quickly realized that a typical German’s English proficiency was noticeably worse than a Dane’s. *What if we’re on the wrong train? What if we miss our connection? How long will we need to sit on these bags for? Are we completely fucked right now?* Suddenly we had gone to hell, and we were high as dick — nervous-to-talk-to-anyone-because-our-faces-looked-like-they-were-glitching-out high, choking-on-cotton-mouth-and-didn’t-have-any-water high, forget-what-we’re-talking-about-mid-sentence-and-then-laugh-uncontrollably-about-it high, growing-paranoia-that-we’ve-made-a-disastrous-mistake high. In all of twenty minutes our trip had taken a nosedive, and it metaphorically, as well as literally, smelled like shit. But we didn’t have a choice. We were there. We were going to get through it. We were, after all, two vaguely muscular twenty-year-olds in our physical prime.

And somehow we managed, at least in part because we were lucky. Lucky that a few strangers picked up on our confusion (or maybe even inebriation) and told us which trains to get on and translated announcements for us. Then finally, hours later, our highs began to calm down and some seats finally opened up.

“That was so dumb man, we are so dumb,” Phil said, shaking his head.

“Yeah it was pretty fuckin dumb,” I added.

“*How young we were,*” Phil offered sarcastically.

We both started laughing uncontrollably, this time not just because we were high. *How young we were five hours ago.*

“I like it because you can say it about anything at any time,” Phil added, “*how young we were.*”

Towards the end of the train ride we were approached by a couple of guys in their mid-twenties. The two of them, taking one look at us, presumably realizing that we were all vaguely muscular and all in our physical prime, knew exactly what was going on.

“Oktoberfest right?”

“Yeah, how’d you know?”

“Only reason Americans would be here, plus we’re going there too.”

The two of them, Ellesse and Omri, were from the other end of Germany and had, much like us, spent all day on the train. They were more than happy to provide the booze, and the four of us drank and discussed hip-hop, and they told us about the festival. It was Ellesse’s third trip to Oktoberfest and Omri’s second. Old pros compared to us. They made sure we got where we needed to and even helped us hail a cab when we got to Munich.

That could've been so much worse, I thought on my way out of the train station, relieved that, at least theoretically, the stressful part of the trip was done with.

It was about one am when we finally reached the campsite. Even though a lot of people were sleeping, it was high energy, packed with tents, loads of (thank god) English speakers, and just reeked of party. Our tent itself wasn't ideal: There were all of four inches of space left when Phil and I got inside, the air mattresses and sleeping bags they gave us were basically garbage, the entire woods environment was riddled with bugs in addition to being pretty cold, and the bathrooms were completely disgusting, done in by hundreds of maximally drunk people. But we were too excited to complain – after all, *it was Oktoberfest, man*.

How young we were.

The following day, nine am, we were ready to go lederhosen and all. Phil and I met up with our friend Sam, who was also staying at the campsite. Our plan was simple: drink, drink more, meet up with our friend Lauren who was coming later in the day, drink more, then head home and probably drink more. It didn't sound *too* hard. So the three of us grabbed breakfast and then began to take advantage of the all-you-can-drink beer option at the campsite. Then the real adventures began.

Beers 1-2: We're chilling at the campsite, mostly complaining about how gross the bathrooms are. It sounds like none of us are really anticipating showering, probably not brushing our teeth either. Not in this shithole. Speaking of shitholes, even shitting is proving challenging. Actually, now that we're talking about it, I really need to shit, like I *should* shit, I can't have this bothering me all day. I know the stalls are gross but I can do this, I mean, they can't be *that* bad and I kinda have to, let's just try...Ok never mind, guys, it smells like *fucking shit*, the floors are soaking wet, I don't even want to say, everything is stained with, well let me just say it's some combination of vomit and diarrhea. I can't do it. If it was *only* vomit or *only* diarrhea, maybe, but vomit *and* diarrhea, not happening. But there are better bathrooms far down the path. Turns out it's really annoying to shit while wearing lederhosen, but it's clean so shit I will. Okay, off to the fairgrounds then, we hop on a bus. It's actually kind of far, wasn't the point of the camp that it *wasn't far*? Why are we always being lied to? Woah, this is it? This shit is *huge*.

Beers 3-8¹: Damn this tent is massive, it's actually insane, this is insane, there must be over a thousand people in this tent alone. It's so loud too, and everyone is wearing lederhosen. The lederhosen companies must be making bank right now. There's an orchestral band in the center, on a stage, they periodically start playing some sort of traditional German song which makes everyone stand and cheers each other. We don't know what we're cheers-ing but we do it anyways. Occasionally someone stands on their table and chugs their beer, everyone claps. It's definitely a party unlike any other, and it's only 11. The beer is good, really good, we make some friends at our table, we go pee pretty often. I'm no doubt already feeling that first stein. We agree to get some air, maybe go on a ride, so we leave the tent and, thanks to our newfound lack of inhibition, decide to go on a giant free fall ride. It takes us up, *way up*, no way I'd enjoy this sober, but drunk I just love

¹ The beers in the tent come in large 'steins' which, although this isn't made clear to festival-goers, are equal to 4-5 beers each.

to let my legs dangle 700 feet above the ground, but I'm not sure I'm ready for the fall. You can see all of Munich from up here. It's too late Sam says. What? It's too late Phil says. What? Too... *ahhhhhhhhhh*. Don't yak. Don't yak. I didn't yak? Ok, it's over. That was actually fun, but you know what else is fun? Let's drink more.

Beers 9-14: A different tent this time, wait, maybe the same tent? I'm not sure; we're definitely sitting in a different part of it. We're with these Caribbean guys and get another stein. And damn, these dudes are blinged the fuck out, damn those are some nice chains, damn, fuck, these dudes have mad dreds and some sick accents. Fuck, these guys are chill. What are there names again? Michael. Let's get another, yeah, let's definitely, let's get another beer with these guys.

Beers 15-19: These guys, they're, let's talk about hip-hop with them, everyone, yeah, everyone likes hip-hop, ok yeah, now let's, let's make sure we add them on social media, since they're our friends and ya know, we can't, we can't forget this. His username is MichaelScooby, that's dope. Like Scooby-Doo, like Scooby snacks like ya, except this guy, this guys not a dog, well he's like *a dawg*, dawg. Yeah, fuck. Ah wait, can I say that? Look an official Oktoberfest photographer, no way we're gonna actually buy that overpriced shit though. Cheese! Fuck are they really? They, these fuckin' guys, they bought it for us. That's so nice. I *love* these guys. I love fucking Scooby-Doo over here, I'm bout to, I'm bout to spam his insta with likes, that's like damn, he is a dawg, he's our fuckin' dawg, dog. Shit are they...are they...throwing knives into the table? Are we also, are we, we're throwing knives in the table? Dude you bent the knife let me fix that...fuck, my hand is, it's bleeding. What the fuck just happened. Fuck, fuck.

Beers 20-24: Ok this ... this is definitely a new tent now.

Wait. What the fuck happened to my hand? It's fucking bleeding.

This old German man, he doesn't, he doesn't get anything we're saying, but he's so funny. He's soooooo funny. Did he say he's a fisherman? Jesus. He thinks we're so funny. Let's take a picture. This guy...this guy is so fucking cute. He's just old and he's here by himself and...he's just he's so nice... this is so cute. And he won't stop laughing at us, what a, what a fuckin saint this fuckin guy.

Beers 24-???: Fuck me. We're not even in a tent, we're outside. Wait where's Sam? Where's Sam? Oh Lauren's here? Hey Lauren. Wait Lauren! It's great to see you! Thank god Lauren's here, Phil, *thank God* Lauren's here. I completely forgot she was coming. Yeah, but shit, where's Sam?

Ok this is a tent, maybe Sam is here. Phil did you see? Lauren's here. But where's?

Where's Sam?

Lauren's not, Lauren's not that drunk, let's let's get another...

Fuck dude, what happened to my hand?

Beers ???-???: Please Lauren, catch...catch...catch up.

Did I just drop? Fuck Lauren, Lauren, I dropped my stein, I spilled on, on those guys. I think...I think we... let's...fuck...let's uhhhh... let's leave. Wait, where's, where's

where's Sam?

Wait, wait, I'm back at the camp. Where's Lauren? Where's Phil? What time is it? This phone says 9. This phone that what the...what the fuck...wait, this isn't my phone, wait why is it on Find My iPhone? Find Jake's phone? That's my phone. *I lost my phone fuck me I lost my phone fuck fuck fuck fuck...fuck. I'm so fucking stupid this is so...* Ok, ok, it's fine this...this says its close. Let's ask the desk. No that's not my phone, that one's, that one's way too fucked up. Let's keep looking. It's like it's right here and I can't get any closer. I can't get any fuckin closer. Let's ask these people, they can't help, but they're nice. They're really nice, I honestly love nice people. What, what time is it? It's already 10:30? Where. Is. My. Phone. Let's just ask the desk again.

Shit that was my phone. It's fucked. It's destroyed. I can't use it. Phil, my phone is fucked, the screen is completely destroyed. I can't even. And fuck what did I, what did I even send to people? I must've said *something* stupid to someone. And I can't check. It doesn't work. I'm gonna die. Phil, I'm gonna fucking die. What? Alright, fine, let's just keep, let's keep partying. There's a DJ going right now any...anyways.

Phil these girls, these girls want to smoke, let's smoke. We can't fit them all in our tent, well...maybe. Wait Phil, where did we put the weed? Dude I can't find the weed, fuck dude, where's dude where is the fucking weed...I think I'm...I think I'm done...

When I woke up the next morning, my focus wasn't on how I'd fully blacked out for more than five hours, or that my phone was completely unusable, or that the weed was missing (or that Sam was missing!)—it was on the sharp needle I felt running directly through my brain. It was 6 am. I'd never been more hungover. I ran out to pee. Afterwards, I vomited. For a while. To the point of dry heaving. Actually worse. Stomach fluid, dried beer. Whatever was coming out of my body, it was disgusting. I needed water. I sprinted to a fountain, chugged a bottle. Waited five minutes, puked all of it up. That's when I realized that I hadn't *just* blacked out for an entire day; I'd spent an entire afternoon drinking, had eaten *nothing* during that time, and hadn't had a sip of water in over twenty hours. Nothing but some 20+ beers were in my system. I tried to hydrate but I kept puking. I tried to calm my stomach down, but no, just more painful dry, beer-tinged vomit. I needed help, seriously. I told Phil and Sam, who showed up at that point (I wasn't in any shape to listen to what had happened to him). My stomach wouldn't keep anything down. It had happened to me before. I needed an IV to get water in my system.

"Guys I hate to say it but I think there's a good chance I need to go to the hospital."

"Yeah" Sam says dryly, "there's no color in your face. You should probably go."

And that morning, with my phone destroyed, my memory gone, no recollection of the questionable texts I may have sent, and my body failing me, it seemed like I'd succeeded in destroying my entire life in about twelve hours. I had taken my vaguely muscular body in its physical prime and destroyed it. Pushed it past what it could handle. But, I'd like to imagine, even with no color in my face, at least one non-related female would've thought I was quite striking.

So we taxi to the Munich *klinikum*. It's massive and industrial, and oddly empty. Sam and Phil help me through three hallways before we find someone to talk to. Her English wasn't great but she understood what I needed.

"70 Euros."

Almost immediately she hooked me up. I laid on a table for 45 minutes, IV in arm, and—*bam*—back to normal. A vaguely muscular twenty-year-old male in physical prime. Like nothing had ever happened. *Thank god*. When I looked up it was only noon, still an entire day ahead of us.

The party wasn't over. The party could never *really* be over. Not on abroad. Not with a group of guys who had fundamentally committed themselves to experiencing as much as fast as they possibly could at essentially whatever cost. Not with the attitude of no regrets and constant indulgence that we'd infused our travels with to that point. Not at fucking Oktoberfest. There was an entire day ahead of us, one of only however many we'd been granted on this crazy trip, and as much as my body resented the thought of alcohol, I had come to Munich for one reason, and a severe hangover, broken phone, and lost memory weren't gonna prevent me from having a good time. I'd just need to pace myself a little better, and, ya know, eat food.

And unlike the day prior, or the day before that when I took the edible on the train, or pretty much any other party I ever attended in my life before this, I actually 'paced' myself. Even while Sam and Lauren and Phil drank to belligerence, and while every sober muscle in my body begged me to join in, I managed to keep control and drink only one (well maybe one and a half) stein. I ate food and drank water and enjoyed the Munich night. In the meantime, Lauren recapped what had happened the previous day, how she'd managed to meet up with us only to see that I was well past gone, spoke only in semi-coherent phrases, couldn't shut up about Sam being gone, or how my hand was bleeding, or this old German guy we met who was so cute. But I also begged her to take us back to the campsite, which she wasn't even staying at, and luckily she did. We were reminiscing already. I suggested we ride the Ferris wheel to cap it all off.

It was crowded, but the sun was setting and the group of us waited in line for the wheel. Sam and Lauren needed to pee though so they left for the bathroom. After about twenty minutes I realized there were about 30,000 people at the festival that day and that my phone was broken, and that if we were ever gonna get on that wheel me and Phil would just have to go—finding them was borderline hopeless. And just like that, Sam was lost again.

But it didn't matter at all, he was at least with Lauren. So Phil and I and the four strangers in our car slowly rotated our way up to the top of the wheel, and when we did it was like nothing I'd ever

seen. Thousands and thousands of drunkards wandering around tent to tent, huge roller coasters wrapping around the grounds, the sprawl of Munich all around. That cliché crept up on me again: picturesque.’ And it was. And all I wanted to do in the whole world was take a picture. But I couldn’t—my phone was broken.

Still, looking down at that beautiful view after the couple of days I’d had, I could only think — *how young we were*. It seemed like every mistake we could’ve made, we did. Every naïveté that could’ve been taken advantage of, had been. Every youthful indulgence had been indulged. I’d finally seen the answer to that question of just how far I could push my vaguely muscular body in its physical prime, and it wasn’t pretty, or cheap, or striking. It was wasteful and destructive and overwhelmingly forgetful. On that Ferris wheel, for maybe the first time since I’d come abroad, pace *wasn’t* the point. Just being there in that moment was, even if Sam was still missing.

Because in truth, for as many mistakes as we’d made those few days, it could’ve been a hell of a lot worse. We could’ve not met those guys on the train who made sure we got to Munich. We could’ve not found the clean bathroom to shit in. We could’ve not managed to find Lauren and we would’ve never gotten back to the tents. I could’ve not found my phone at all. Sam could’ve never shown up. My friends could’ve not taken me to the hospital and just left me there to puke all morning while they had fun. My hand could’ve been cut even worse. So in spite of all the bullshit, or the fact that we hadn’t showered or brushed our teeth or really used the bathroom at all for over 48 hours, and still had another 13 hours on a train ahead of us the following day, I still felt really damn lucky. Lucky to be on top of the world surrounded by some of my closest friends. Lucky that life is always ready to remind us just how naive we really are. Lucky to be able to just reminisce and laugh about the one thing that’s always true: *how young we were*.

Riding the train back the next day, while still stressful and tedious and long and confusing, was at least a little bit easier knowing that no matter what the universe threw my way, I’d find a way to, at least, survive. I’d learned my lesson, felt (for once) my own limits, and for this train ride I even managed to reserve a seat.

20 October 2017