

How to Survive

Written by

Erik Harrison

**A note on casting**

The protagonist here is credited as "Mike" after the performer it was originally commissioned for, who used he/him pronouns. Mike has generously allowed the piece to be performed elsewhere, and subsequent productions updated the character name and pronouns accordingly.

"Charming" and "heartbreaking" are qualities that know no gender, race, age, or body-type. Neither should the role.

Lights up on Mike, seated center stage. One leg propped up in front of him, as if favoring an injury. Which he is. He is dressed in a suit and facing the audience which he addresses directly

MIKE

There I was. Lost, miles from civilization, without food or water. I had fallen thirty feet to the bottom of a ravine and shattered my left leg. For three day I was pinned, immobile, screaming for rescue. Every night the animals would circle closer, and every day I would grow more delirious with pain and exhaustion. My only tools were -

pulls the items out of pocket while speaking

MIKE

- a clear barrel Bic ballpoint pen, a diamond engagement ring, and my razor sharp wits. Fortunately I had a plan. A plan...

Thank you all for coming to my TED talk, which I'll be crowdfunding into a self help book, "Better Living Through Not Dying: How you too can overcome the shattered leg of your dreams and survive three hellish nights in the rocky ravine of your soul." The ravine is a metaphor.

I tried to make the kind of book I wish someone had given to me. Specifically I wish someone had given it to me before I fell in a fucking ravine. Then I'd already know how to get out. Save me some time.

So. Bic pen, diamond ring, incredible intellect. How did he do it? Well, ladies, gentlemen, adorable children of all ages - I have to warn you. It's a story so awesome, so incredible, so full of derring-do that telling it has inspired spontaneous offers of marriage from anyone within a hundred yard radius. While I am flattered, ladies, gentlemen, adorable children - I am taken. I do accept high fives and bottles of small batch bourbon, however. Kids, have your parents get your liquor for you.

You want to know how it happened, well, I'll tell you.

(MORE)

## MIKE (CONT'D)

There I was, dressed as Batman at a Costume Karaoke night, Christian Bale-ing it through the entire Burt Bacharach back catalog when, during the final chorus of "What's New Pussycat" the crowd parted, and I fell in love. Not because she was the most beautiful woman in the room, though she was. Not because she was the smartest, funniest woman I'd ever met. I didn't know that about her yet. I didn't know her name was Sally Jenkins, I didn't know she was a restaurateur with a graduate degree in geopolitics and an almost obnoxious love of the great outdoors. I didn't know that she was kind, and generous, and in intimidatingly good shape. The only thing I knew about her was she had a smile on her face that lit up the room, and a wicked look in her eyes that made you wonder if you were in on the joke, or the butt of it. I fell in love with that, that look on her face.

Also she was dressed as Catwoman. Michelle Pfeiffer in skin-tight leather Catwoman. And I was dressed as Batman. I fell in love with her because of the smile on her face and because she was dressed as skin-tight leather Michelle Pfeiffer Catwoman while I was dressed as Batman singing "What's New Pussycat."

It was fate.

Ladies. Gentleman. Adorable children of all ages. You may be asking yourself, "Mike, this is all very sexy, but what does this have to do with your thrilling survival story? I came here for motivation dammit!" Well, let me tell you, if sexy Catwoman isn't enough motivation to survive a leg shattering fall in the wilderness, then nothing is. Also, if you think that the image of me in the Batsuit isn't connected to my clever survival plan, then let me tell you about a little literary technique called foreshadowing. Chekhov's gun motherfucker. It's going off.

Where was I?

Right, at the bottom of a ravine with a shattered leg, delirious to the point of hallucination. That's where I was. Sometimes I relived memories. Sometimes I imagined waking up in my bed and everything was fine.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

I half dreamed of being carried to safety and explaining how I got there, only to have some howl in the distance bring me back to my body. One minute I was running my fingers over Sally's engagement ring, the next I was back with Sally, on the night we met.

I was so enraptured by her that it took me a solid minute to realize that the jazzy trumpet solo that I was hearing was not the music of my heart underscoring this perfect moment, but the intro to my next song, and that I'd been staring 45 seconds at a woman carrying a whip that would have given Indiana Jones penis envy. I saw no way to rescue such an awkward moment, so I did the only thing I could. I made it worse.

Cheeseball pose

MIKE

(sings)

*You see this guy, this guy's in love with you.  
Yes I'm in love, who looks at you the way I do*

-

Do you know "This Guy's In Love With You?" It is, quite possibly, the worst song ever written and I love it. Written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, recorded by The Tijuana Brass, and sung by Herb Alpert, a trumpet player with the vocal range of an air-raid siren, it is the pinnacle of Vegas cheese, and I'm staring at a total stranger singing "When you smile I can tell we know each other very well" which of course we didn't, but something about it just feels right and then the sax comes in and the piano is just milking as the crescendo builds to "I need your love, I want your love. Say you're in love, in love with this guy BAH BAH BUH BAHHHH -"

Howls in pain - he's become too excited and he's jostled his leg, and now he's hunched over the thing, silently crying. It's a long moment before he laughs a little under his breath, half recovered, his tone changed.

MIKE

It became our song.

(MORE)

## MIKE (CONT'D)

It started out as a joke, a thing I'd sing to make her laugh when she was pissed at me, or upset at the world, or just because. And then after that it stopped being ironic, and I really meant it every time. When "I love you wasn't enough", somehow that stupid song was. When she wasn't around, I'd sing it to myself, just for comfort. Not even realize I was doing it, just singing to myself. I was going to sing it when I proposed.

Friends were taking her kayaking under pretense, and I'd meet her at the bottom of the river, and there would be a party, and I'd be dressed up, and the trumpet would play and I'd sing. I need your love, I want your love. Say you're in love, in love with this guy" and here comes the super cheesy part, I'd get down on one knee, and pull the ring out... [he holds up the ring] "if not I'll just die."

The lights have begun to shift and continue to do so slowly over the rest of the play - dawn. Perhaps in the light we can see Mike better. Perhaps he looks dirty. Tired. His suit bedraggled

## MIKE

And I'd say "Sally will you marry me" and she'd say "yes" and we'd have a party and all our friends would be there and we'd dance on my two functional legs and be happy forever.

I can see the whole thing in my mind, as if it's happening now. I'm not late. I'm not afraid that she's going to get to the bottom of the river before I do and figure it out. I'm not leaving my car and cutting through the woods. I'm not lost. It's not getting dark. I'm not falling down into a ravine I didn't see. I'm not screaming for three days hoping someone will find me. I'm not wearing the suit I was supposed to get engaged in, I'm not holding the ring like a talisman that will bring her to me, and I'm not talking to myself, hoping I can imagine my way out of here by pretending I'm already safe.

No, ladies and gentlemen and adorable children, I'm holding her to me [he clasps the ring to his chest], the trumpet fading as the light does, dancing slowly, and it's perfect.

MIKE

(singing shakily)

My hands are shakin'

Don't let my heart keep breaking 'cause

I need your love.

I want your love.

Say you're in love, in love with this guy.

If not I'll just die

Blackout