



LATE SUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Lucas Marshall

THE CICADAS' droning symphony wails as dinner by headlamp concludes. Summer sausage, black beans and rice and bell peppers fill our hungry stomachs, but the food is unable to satisfy our bigger hunger. We long for more air beneath our heels tonight. Food and cookware stowed away, Patrick, Leanne, Sarah and I once again dawn our harnesses, pulling them over our pants, quickdraws and carabiners clink and ding like wind chimes. Music to our ears. We pack lightly, only planning to be out for a few hours.

Proceeding from camp up the rust red dirt road. Rocks jut out of its surface, waiting to roll traveler's ankles, or tear parts from low clearance automobiles. Into the calm sycamores we three walk, their wooden stoic faces unmoved by our late night journey. Passing campsites, the growing crowds of Labor Day retreaters, their eyes follow our shadowy path. They are bedding down for the evening. Numerous open campfires dot the meadow; music mingles with the smoke in the night air. The moon is low behind the trees, peeking at us over cliffs and branches. It catch-

es one last glimpse as Leanne leads us out of the clearing, ascending into the trees. We giddily follow her like baby ducks. Above the foliage, the cliffs tower above and stand rigid against a cloudless sky. The light and shadows cast by our headlamps escort us up the path, over downed trees and worn boulders. Patrick points out plants by their Latin names, *Toxicodendron radicans* spotlighted by his headlamp.

It nears ten upon reaching the looming cliffs. Tightening straps and flaking ropes, we realize we've climbing for over 12 hours, trekking all over the canyon. Smiles unanimously decide that's somehow a good idea. Shedding fleece jackets, and shirts, the night air hugs our body as tie into the sharp end and climb. This nocturnal outing perfect training for 24 Hours of Horseshoe Hell and the unforeseen epic, getting used to the focused view and climbing only by artificial light is an experience. But the night climbing is easy, and fears of the dark soon vanish.

I tie in, rattle my hands in my chalk bag and begin to ascend. The sandstone is full of friction and the climbing is fluid. I keep my body close to the

red stone and reach full extensions, making large moves up the feature-full rock. Up and over a small overhang, on to a sheer face. It feels like climbing a staircase compared to the routes of earlier in the day. My one-watt L.E.D. illuminates the rock above and shows the secrets it hides: pockets and underclings for my hands and effervescent skink lizards and walking sticks to excite the mind. I whisper kind words to the little friends of the night and thank them for sharing the stone with me. Stemming my legs wide, I finish up at the anchors that rest at the top of a small dihedral looming on the headwall.

The route was just enough of a challenge to break a sweat and fill my arms with lactic acid and make my veins swell. Anchoring in and setting up my rappel, I take time to turn and look across the canyon, seeing the campfires and lights of the cabins around. With the clouds' ghostly long wisps on the horizon and stars abundant I begin to rappel down, lowering and taking big jumps off the wall, pushing myself away from the rock.

In each push I distance myself from the rock and darkness swallows me for a moment before spitting me back out as I swing back into the rock to bounce again. The sensation of claustrophobia, the darkness and the open space, are overwhelming. They close me in and surround me. My feet touch the ground to find the others buzzing with energy. We are alive in the night. Our excitement puts confidence into our fingers, and wildfires burn in our eyes, in search of adrenaline inducing adventures.

COYOTES CALL out in the distance as the audacious Patrick exclaims plans to send his nemesis from our last trip down to the canyon. Memories get Pat all riled up, the route kicked Pat's butt last time he tried to climb it. Patrick wants a rematch and our razzing has him ready to gun up the stone. Lavender Eye is his challenge in the night. It's beautiful climbing with a four-foot overhang that stares down at you from 45 feet above the deck. It is a walk above and below, but the hardest section of the route, the crux, takes no prisoners.

As usual, Pat is bouncing with excitement. We playfully scold him, telling him to calm down, though we have complete trust in the little guy. Patrick is an incredible climber with amazing strength and

endurance. With more positive attitude than a preschool teacher and smarts that could have him answering questions from Alex Trebek or equally presenting to a room full of biologists. He is an amazing individual that I have trusted with my life countless times on rock. He is an encyclopedia of knot tying and rescue techniques, a master of sciences, and a biologist. He absorbs information like a sponge, and it never leaves his brain. A walking, and climbing pile of knowledge. A past in martial arts, diving and gymnastics give him the body control to overcome almost any obstacle that comes his way in climbing, almost.

PATRICK TIES in with his favorite, the double bowline, and checks all of his gear and begins to effortlessly slide up the route, his headlamp enlightening his perspective, straight up the rock. From his illuminated halo, I watch him pass the eye on the route, a uniquely pink section shaped like an almond. It seems the eye is not asleep; it is open as Patrick passes over it, enlightening its presence, then once again enveloped back in the darkness. He clips four bolts and rests calmly below the overhand above up in the darkness. He has attempted this crux many times without success, his bloody fingerprints without a doubt still on the wall. He is back for revenge and victory.

He acknowledges that he is ready and we watch him climb, unable to really see because of the night. As spectators we listen to his sounds and grunts and watch a starkly contrasted silhouette move and change above us. His fingers wrap the first crimp and reach for the second, his feet holding strong, body almost parallel to the ground. We shout words of encouragement as he shoots for the next hold but comes up short and loses his grip, sending him down back toward the earth in the darkness until the rope catches him and leaves him hanging in blank space.

He curses the stone, and though we cannot see it, we are sure the stone is grinning back. Pat is not done. He swings back over to the rock and sets up again to make the crux move. As before, he sticks the first crimp and reaches for the second, making the stick and begins to move upward over the empty darkness. All is still in eyes below as Pat's light

looks upward and we only see him for a moment, pushing through the crux.

Then through the black, a grunt accompanied by a beam of light slicing down, leaving a streak on our retinas, and our ears absorb a scream that deafens all that is around us. We shoot light from our headlamps, illuminating the rock face to see Patrick hanging below the overhang, swing like a pendulum, his foot wrapped in a loop in the rope, cinching this bare ankle, holding him within the teeth of the ferocious night. His pain pours down through darkness and the struggle is visible as he peers and pulls at the rope constricting his ankle. Time becomes lost; I can feel my heart in my throat, its beats choking me. Adrenaline.

I STAND up and tighten my leg straps and order someone to clad me with gear as I put climbing shoes on my feet. Snapping into a panic driven motion, I secure Velcro and grab my headlamp from Leanne and tie into another rope while Sarah sets up to belay me. I am clipping bolts before my belayer has me.

The lower section of the route is a technical face climb following broken flakes and vertical cracks. Their shadows stand out clean in the beam of my lamp and I concentrate on moving fast but safely. Careful moves, and technical footwork. Imagine defusing a bomb, while climbing a ladder and doing yoga.

I follow up Patrick's lifeline and clip into his draws keeping my core tight. I maneuver my body toward the third clip. Like a broken chandelier, Patrick swings above me, light illuminating his hanging, tangled leg. He continues to struggle, attempting to decipher the puzzle his is in.

Feeling my breath reflected off the rock, back on to my face as a glance down my body, searching for a foothold to shift my weight. I spy a ridge wide as a butter knife, my foot sinks on to it, melding soft rubber and sandstone. My body static with my digits gasting a crack in the stone, like putting your fingers into a crack between double doors and pulling them open. I stand fast and transfer my weight on my fingertips easing off the tension on my left hand and I move it so it is beside my right, each ridge of my fingerprints pulling against the stone.

MY LEFT FOOT moves up to a slope, stabilizing me, and my right hand reaches up and sinks into a small slot where I stack my fingers, then twisting, lock them into the rock. I clip the draw and listen to Patrick's yelling as I think I feel it start to rain. Confused, I look over at my arm, and my eyes widen. Wishing the sky would open up and pour down, Noah could float by beneath us to help us out, instead I see blood drops dripping on me from above.

"Are you ok?" I ask, thinking of nothing better to say.

Pat responds between heavy breaths, struggles, and grunts. He says that with all the struggling to free himself, he has cut into his leg with the rope.

"I'm fine." He concludes, but I can hear the pain in his retort.

I send the last section of the climb up to him, blood occasionally hitting me and the rock around. Maneuvering around Patrick, I clip into the draw he is hanging from with my PAS then attach a sling of webbing to the same bolt, then another longer runner to the next bolt down for redundancy. I check on Patrick's leg, it looks bad, but the real problem lies in the situation. Luckily the resolve to free Pat is clear.

ATTACHING MYSELF to the loose end of the sling and allow my PAS to put my weight slightly above Patrick. We are now both swinging and hanging in the dark, dangling from a sandstone overhang like a disco ball at a dance club. Bumping against him, "Come here often?" I ask. "I hang around here time to time," he replies. The conversation is short, but comforting. "Its magic time," Pat says as I move into position around him and he does his best to tuck into a cannon ball position, folding his body in half and hugging his legs so he can still reach his feet. With his body between my legs, I put him into a leg lock, so I can use as much of my body as possible to lift him. Right hand wrapping the highest point on the sling as I can, I twist my arm and wrist into it.

We look at each other, half blinding ourselves with our lamps, then on the count of three I pull my body with all the gusto I could muster and with my free hand grab above my right on the sling. Holding a portion of his weight allows Pat to free his constricted leg, liberating his foot

from the nocturnal snake that had attacked him.

As he is freed, to our sudden surprise, we find that his leg was holding more of his exhausted body weight and when his ankle is released, he slips from my hold and falls down into the night where his rope catches him some fifteen feet below. That was the final fright; a last spasm from the body of a monster that everyone thought was dead at the end of the movie. Pat is lowered down to the waiting earth; a communal sigh of relief is shared. Having Pat's weight now on the ground, upright, has lifted the burden of fear from our shoulders. Sarah, with tears from fright, now of joy, hugs Pat as he unties his double bowline. He smiles at her, saying he is ok. Patrick breaks the silence, "Well that was interesting." Then responds, shaking his head and grinning, "Shit happens!" We have our funny man back.

SMILES SHINE through the darkness. I clean the route, unclipping my PAS and the webbing from the bolts, then clipping a bail biener to the roof bolt and clip the rope into it. I am lowered down, and we retreat to camp with as much haste as we can afford.

We joke at the image of a cartoon character caught in a foot noose, swinging from a tree illustrated in our minds. Pat stops and turns to yell at the wall that he will be back tomorrow, shaking his fist. Well all shush the crazy gimp.

The group walks slowly as he limps over powdered dirt and rolling stone in the glow of starlight. Our jostling gear adds cadence as the cicadas conclude their epic rendition of moonlight sonata and a dog's lonely howl marks the end to this night's adventure. Walking past other campers, completely unaware of our epic night, we finally bed down in our bags and add some forty winks to the dream at this day's end.

Lucas Marshall is a climber, artist, writer and photographer living in Omaha, Nebraska. In this actual account Patrick managed to free himself and came very close to crushing the author on his way up to help.

- www.lucasmrshall.com