

Stuck in Zorbaland

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

My name is Todd Z. and my life is stuck in the same recurring vicious cycle. Every night, I take three capsules of Hexol which puts me to sleep really quick. In the morning, my alarm clock goes off at the same time of six o'clock, prompting me to get up right away—which I never do. At six thirty, my secondary phone alarm sounds and I'm forced to throw off my flannel sheets and touch down with both feet on the hardwood floor of my attic bedroom. After going down the same flight of stairs feeling heavily sedated, I gather my casual attire and head to the washroom to shower and brush my teeth. After grabbing the nearly identical sandwich lunch congealing in the fridge's same top shelf, I'm out the door and off to Zorbaland where I both work in a soup kitchen cafeteria and get my pharmaceutical med appointments done.

Where did the word 'Zorbaland' come from, you ask? It all started for me at the hospital's annual costume ball and dance in the community centre, where DJ Madworld played 90s hits for the consumer patients eager to make new friends or try out dating with like-minded folks. As I remained on the sidelines of 'The Mall's' dance floor—as the place is frequently called in the neuro-diverse community—a female friend of mine asked me to dance with her and I quickly declined, prompting her to say: "Todd, if you keep this up, you'll be stuck in Zorbaland for good!" This quick word of warning from my friend Valerie really stuck. 'Zorbaland' soon became the hospital not as a means of getting treated and feeling well, but as some type of 'gaol' as the olden English would write it. A real landscape of neuro-incarceration.

Today was a day I had to leave my shift early in the caf to get to the clinical laboratory in the Tower Gate Complex. After telling my supervisor that I had to head off, he warned me about being late to my shift tomorrow with our line cook Fred on vacation in the vicinity of Wendiki Beach. After leaving Frankie's Soup Kitchen, I walked along the old brick wall of yesteryears past, and entered T. G. Complex's revolving doors with its heavily contrasting stark 'glass box' architecture. After walking through the lobby and waving to my fellow friend and ally Ronnie who was on a shift in the food kiosk, I took the same elevator to the laboratory on the 14th floor. The truth is, it was actually the 13th floor but someone superstitious and powerful decided that the number "13" was too unlucky so the elevator went straight from 12 to 14 to avoid a real calamity with opinionated numerologists who thought the number's very existence should be questioned. Anyways, after exiting the elevator on the 14th floor, I followed the same quadrilinear floor plan to the lab which was fully run and funded by Optidyne Corporation through the _____ Hospital Complex.

"Please sign in to get your bloodwork done. Are you fasting today, Mr...?" A clinician at intake asks.

“Mr. Todd Zimler is my name. And yes. I haven’t eaten anything solid since last night.”

“Are your bowel movements regular today, Mr. Zimler?”

“Regular as it can be, I suppose. The Hexol sure doesn’t do things much good.” I answer staring up at the sign above intake advertising Optidyne and its clinical certification standards.

“Refrain from commenting. I just need quick answers, Mr. Zimler. I have a lot of patients to sort through today. Please and thank you.”

“Understood.” I reply, grumbling slightly. After the short interaction with intake, I sit in the waiting area for the phlebotomy nurse to call me into room 2345. After about fifteen minutes, a familiar woman with a white lab coat pokes her head out into the waiting area, hollering: “Zimler! You’re next. Proceed to the bloodwork room!”

“Sure thing, ma’am!” I answer, mechanically rolling up my sleeve to reveal my bare skinny right arm to her. Almost immediately, she sanitizes the inner part of the elbow with a cotton swab and jabs me with a blood collection needle to fill five vials for ____ blood and fasting blood work.

“All done. Do you need a slip for the pharmacy?”

“Yes ma’am.” I reply, pulling my right sleeve back down to conceal the bandaid and white tape placed over the small bloodwork puncture hole.

After heading back to the elevators, I notice a wall with various research postings on it such as: *“Are you constipated and bloated from Hexol? If so, you could be eligible to be a part of our laxative study. Just call us at _____.”*

After catching the elevator to the 11th floor, where Zorbaland’s patient pharmacy is located, I approach the small hole in the wall where two pharmacists are both heavily cramped in the Plexiglas reinforced booth.

“Thanks, Todd. Please wait for a few minutes while we get you your new script of Hexol.” A stooping blond lady with wide-rimmed glasses says after I hand her the bloodwork slip. After sitting in the hallway close-by, I spot a familiar patient ally waiting for his bag of pills to be delivered to him in the same brown paper bag.

“Are you counting on leaving Zorbaland anytime soon, friend?”

“How do you know about Zorba?” I ask.

“You mean, Zorba Zorba?”

“No just one Zorba.” I reply.

“They say the clinical way of saying it is too harsh and jarring to the ear. Zorba folk wanted to soften the sound and that’s how ‘Zorbaland’ really took. The truth is, we’re all stuck in Zorbaland. There’s really no way out.”

“I think I could maybe get out. It’s just a matter of dignity and independence.” I say proudly tilting my chin upwards.

“Friend, if you ever get out of Zorbaland, you should write a book about it. You could really comfort some of the chemically shackled with your words. Would be a really noble thing.” He says eyeing me a certain way to seek my approval.

“Zimler! Your script of Hexol is ready!” The same blond woman with the googly glasses shouts aloud.

“Farewell, friend! To be perfectly honest the real problem with Zorbaland is that everyone in it is stoned!”

“You’re not kidding. They say the meds in Zorbaland are what really keeps us in a giant gerbil cage for every day of our lives.” I tell him as I depart the small hallway waiting area.

“Dr. Zorba would be proud. I know what you mean about a gerbil cage, friend. I’d be stuck in the exercise wheel as everything repeats itself in the same boring circular cycle...” He rambles on faintly as I veer off toward the elevators in the distance.

As I took the elevator back down to ground level, I pondered who Dr. Zorba really was. The truth is, if there was a God of Zorbaland in my opinion, the God would be a psychiatrist on a pedestal, tending to all his many hamster cages throughout his hospital shift. Feeling the bulge in my right jean pocket where the paper bag of Hexol was stashed, I prepared to leave Zorbaland... For now...

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