

Walking back from the clean toilets, I brought up the most discussed topic of the day, 'You know what Elyse, I think there is such a thing as too much bass.' The older members of our staff had been complaining for a few hours. But now, as we walked adjacent to the main stage during the evening act, it was like the sound waves had become rusty and the vibrations in my feet were a hundred little insect bites.

'Free hugs,' said two blonde girls in unison, walking the other way down the path.

'No, we're not allowed,' Elyse and I said together. She didn't say anything else but I added, 'to hug minors,' onto the end of the sentence. At best they were two years younger than me and at worse they were older but we had been given strict instructions by management not to have any sort of affectionate actions with the festival goers or we'd be sacked immediately. Furthermore, I was twenty now not a flipping teenager, so talking down to them was kinda fun.

The girls looked at me weird and before Elyse, who wasn't aware I had gotten used to referring to everyone here as minors could comment, I said, 'I would argue that, the mental age of the people here is below adult-y.'

'You're probably right about that. Did you know I was trained how to hug an under eighteen? Something called a safety hug.'

'What's that?' I said.

'Ok well you stand to the side of them like this and—'

'Wait, I'm gonna be a little kid, hang on.' I got on my knees and pretended to start crying.

My trackies might've got dirty but they already were since it'd rained a lot during the set-up days and I, stupidly having faith in August, hadn't brought a second pair.

'Oh you poor thing, let me hug you in a politically correct way. Oooooorrrffff. No stand up, I can't bend down like that. I'm such an old woman. Ok I stand beside you; my left hand goes on top of your left shoulder, so your head can't rest on my bust and my right hand goes round your back to your right shoulder. Then I can give you a little squeeze.'

In my highest pitched voice possible I said, 'Oh thank you miss I feel much better now.'

'Oh pish. If I wanted to cheer you up, I'd just do this.' And she proceeded to grab my head and give me a two second motorboat. Over her hoody but still. This was Elyse: twenty-nine but looked twenty-three, not stereotypically attractive with big brown freckles and blonde curls. She once shouted at me for making a comment about her rear when she'd

slapped mine multiple times. Far from perfect but in this large ball pit filled with grey balls and wet toilet paper, she was a bright turquoise one, and making this week bearable for me.

I had to get out of my trance and concentrate when reaching our camp. The guide ropes of the tents were nasty suckers full of facades to try and trip you up. All the lamps we had stuck into the ground around this side had been smashed or gone missing, coincidentally it was also the side the festival goers walked past.

‘Right, I’m going to bed,’ she announced.

‘What? But it’s only ten thirty. Our official duties don’t end ‘till eleven. What if an organiser comes down to check on us?’ I said sarcastically. ‘Yeah, not gonna happen, good night.’

‘Enjoy the circus tomorrow.’

I went to the admin marquee and since there was only pencil pushing Simon in there, I decided I could get away with spending the last half an hour of my shift sitting on my butt as a runner on standby. I tried to make a bit of conversation with him but it hadn’t quite clicked between us yet.

A few minutes later someone came in to tell us that there was vomit in the toilet block. To be honest I was amazed it had taken so long. The three nearest toilet blocks were all locked for some reason and we had been told by the organisers to stop bothering them about when they’d be unlocked. And we’d also been told by the organisers to stop asking for more toilet roll. Therefore, this one open block had gotten the nickname, The Gaza Strip. Well, at least now it looked like we’d finally get some toilet cleaners down. We were promised a cleaning crew would do their thing twice a day, I’d been here six days and hadn’t seen them once. The organisers told us to stop asking when they’d be there.

Just after that call was made someone was sent to close the toilet, another person entered the tent to say someone had thrown up.

‘Yes, we are aware, toilet cleaners are on their way,’ said Simon.

‘What? I wasn’t talking about the toilet, there’s vomit on the archway just down there,’ he said.

‘Great so looks like we’ll have a busy night,’ said Simon.

‘It’s probably that they’ve bought milkshakes from that bar, left ‘em out for hours then drank them and now they’re throwing up cos most of the people here are effing idiots,’ I said. ‘And better not be too busy. It’s my day off tomorrow and it’s my turn to abuse the free tickets the circus the other side of town have offered all the staff.’

But by the time eleven O'clock hit and I should've been able to go to bed, we had reports of over twenty people being sick and our whole team (except Elyse) was prepared for a long night.

Toilet cleaners had miraculously turned up and now I was standing outside the toilets. The organisers had reacted fast, suspecting dirty water was the cause, we were told to instruct everyone going into toilets to use a hand sanitiser the organisers had brought with them and pushed on us at every opportunity.

'You know that's not how you deal with an outbreak. You should be washing your hands at every chance you get,' said some random guy after being told not to use soap and water. I was tempted to back chat and say something like '*Oh just cos you were a fucking boy scout means you know about all this type of stuff.*' But my frustration was at those I'd seen constantly refusing to wash their hands throughout the entire festival; not this guy lecturing me on cleanliness.

My rage built even more as it got to half twelve and I felt like I had been forgotten by everyone.

However, Simon, did kindly come to check up on me, 'Hi. How are you doing?'

Maybe I was feeling sorry for myself, but I thought he sounded sympathetic.

'When am I gonna be relieved from here?'

'Er, I'll see if I can get someone.'

To my surprise, in only a few minutes Alistair was walking in my direction.

'Some of them are gonna be rude to you. Don't take it personally,' I said. My pride trying to sound important after supervising a toilet made me give that advice. And it was condescending to Alistair in two ways. One, the kids (most of whom were probably older than me) weren't rude, mainly they gave a blank stare and a confused, "thank you" after, which was an improvement to the average interaction. And two, I was well aware Alistair had had his fair share of drunk egos in his face when trying to enforce the rules, so I wasn't telling him anything he didn't already know.

By the time I got back to the admin tent, we had face masks, gloves, disinfectant all in a big basket, and a crowd of festival goers grouped at the entrance. I had never worked at a festival but everyone else here had, so I knew this must be more than the average alcohol chunder period.

To make things worse, Ben had been sick. A member of our team now gone home since he lived close enough (the other option was quarantine). Overall, we had received fifty-

seven separate incidents of vomiting on our sub-camp alone. With puke news coming from our neighbouring camps on either side, and a bit of diarrhoea.

I went over to a guy I recognised in the patron grouping and opened with my usual, 'Wassup, Jason.'

Jason was a tiny guy from Devon with a square head and flat, light brown hair. He'd also assumed I was gay after witnessing the shenanigans of me and Elyse, and his mates had had a laugh about his disappointment that I wasn't. But it was all in good fun and they often gave me their alcohol for free. It turned out that he was a germaphobe and was doing whatever he could to stay in the cleanest place possible. However, his fear didn't stop Simon from turning him away.

For a little while I just stood around. The looks on my colleagues faces indicated there was lots to do but my inexperience in this type of situation meant I didn't know what these things were. Fortunately, the other staff weren't so idle, constantly moving up and down cleaning anything they could and our surveillance over the toilet block meant it became clean again.

I finally got something to do. We planned to set up wash stations and that meant getting hot water from the HQ, the only actual building on site. It was a long walk with the wagon and I couldn't wrap up the bowls of hot water like I wrapped myself up (the wind was still enough to make me shiver whenever I stood still) meaning they were always cold when I got back. But at least they still had plenty of suds floating in them. When this task was completed, the situation looked in control at last. It was almost 4:30 and a plan had been made for half of us to go to sleep now and wake up at 8:30 to run the camp till lunch, while the other half got their turn to rest.

At 9:30, half an hour after I was supposed to be taking my seat with popcorn at the circus, my tent was shook and I was being told I had to get up now. I resisted the urge to shout something rude back, got ready and headed over to our main staff marquee where a few of the team were sitting in. I stopped just outside to look at a laminated poster attached to the metal pole that had a big red title, "NORO VIRUS," and in the small print it said the best way to fight it is by washing your hands with soap and water and that hand sanitiser doesn't work on its own. They had to be freaking kidding, I spent hours last night telling people that soap and water was wrong and hand sanitiser was the only thing that worked.

Upon entering the admin tent with my mood daring someone to give me an excuse, Simon, who hadn't been to sleep at all, said that a complaint had been made about me.

'What?'

‘They accused you of incompetence for spreading wrong information about the outbreak. The organisers aren’t happy.’

The organisers are the ones who made stand outside a toilet all night spreading the wrong information. They can fuck off.’ And with that I felt a little better.

I spent the next three hours mostly on my phone instead of being helpful. But, between when I went to bed and lunchtime, with washing up bowls and tea towels in sight whichever way you looked, only five more people had been sick.

That’s not a headline though, during my time of scrolling someone had found that a tabloid newspaper had created their own version of events on their website.

**POTENTIALLY DEADLY VIRUS HITS FESTIVAL
INCOMPOTENT WORKERS WITH NO CLUE WHAT TO DO
SURELY REFUNDS FOR GOERS AS STAFF SHOW COMPLETE INABILITY
ABOUT WHAT TO DO**

After scrolling through the slander for multiple minutes, literally the last two lines at the very bottom said...

The festival has still been able to go forward as less than 1% of attendees have shown symptoms.

I entered the staff marquee for an early lunch I looked down at the floor and said, ‘You’re almost thirty, Elyse.’ She had brought her airbed into the staff marquee and was lying under the duvet playing games on her phone.

‘When you lot went to bed at half four, they woke me up, so you’ve had more sleep in the last eight hours than I have. And I can’t sleep in my tent now it’s an oven in the sun.’

‘Fair, but what were you doing the six hours before those eight hours?’

‘Shut up. Also, help me with this?’ she indicated to her phone then lifted up her pink duvet on one side. I took off my shoes and climbed in, relieved that the double air bed had enough space so we could both lie down comfy, with a thick, invisible line between us.

‘Your bed is full of grass.’

‘I know sorry.’

‘Later you wanna hang and do the bare minimum wherever we have to go?’

‘What if we’re told to go to different places?’

‘It’s my day off. They should appreciate every little thing I choose to do today.’

‘Wait, you don’t actually have to be here right now?’

‘Can you see my name on the rota?’

‘Then why are you here?’

‘Help you out. You’re the only reason I’d ever do this again. If you were gone, I’d be gone.’

She was playing one of those games that have four photos on screen and you have to guess the word they mean. I did it for her, the answer was the movie *Troy*.

‘Ok thanks. You can get out now.’

‘You’re just kicking your toy boy out of bed now you’ve had your fun?’

‘Pretty much. Mama only wanted one thing from you.’

‘Never say mama again I swear to God I will throw up.’