

Shallow, Quick

By Pete Malicki

© Pete Malicki 2014

Permission to perform any or all of this play for any reason must be obtained from the author. Please contact him via email if you wish to use it.

Performance of this play may be subject to a royalty. Students, amateur/community theatres, auditionees, co-ops and not-for-profit enterprises are generally able to perform these plays for free.

(but small payments are greatly appreciated)

Contact:

petemalicki@gmail.com

More plays and Pete's latest news:

www.petemalicki.com

Shallow, Quick

© Pete Malicki 2014

A young person suffering from severe social anxiety. He/she speaks quickly.

I grab my backpack and check everything one last time. Water, phone, first aid kit, emergency blanket, food, spare clothing, pen and paper. The basics. I take a breath.

I step outside and the sun hits me full ball in the face. My breathing quickens. It's so bright. What if I get dehydrated? Or sunstroke? The sun is dangerous. I hurry inside and get my legionnaires hat and extra water. Okay. This will be okay.

The blaring sun hits me again but I grit my teeth and go. I make it to the street. A car goes by too close and honks me. This is stupid. Why am I doing this? My shaky hands take a Valium and I put it in a dry mouth. I need to wash it down so I sip some water but I only sip a little because I don't want to run out.

I have to cross the road to use the side with the path so I look both ways. I look again. And again. Cars come out of friggig nowhere. There's nothing in sight so I bolt across, and for one terrifying moment I almost stumble and my head is filled with images of me lying helpless on the road as some hoon careens around the corner and smears my guts all over Barton Avenue. This doesn't happen but it isn't the only road.

I stop and look both ways at every driveway as I head towards the bus shelter. It's almost a kilometre away. The Valium hasn't kicked in yet and I wonder how people do this every day. Aren't they afraid? So many things can get you out here.

Someone's approaching. They're about two hundred metres away. I have the choice of crossing the road again or risking a confrontation. "Just say hello and keep walking." It's simple. She says it's simple. One hundred and fifty metres.

I panic and walk out towards the road but a car goes by doing at least seventy and I stumble back to the path. It's a fifty zone. Who is that crazy bastard trying to kill? My heart is vibrating and the dizziness is closing in. Before I know it the person is near me and I have to get myself together or she'll ask me if I'm okay and god knows what will happen after that. I stretch my arms out, nice and wide like Doctor Lawrence told me. "Scared people don't take the time to yawn."

She passes without comment and I breathe again. My head spins for a moment, then I'm okay. Confident now, I continue down the path and after five minutes I notice I'm spending less time looking up each driveway. I feel like a daredevil.

When I'm three quarters there I realise I'm feeling relaxed, but also hazy. This is bad. I should be focused. What if something happens to me because my guard's down?

I repeat the lyrics to my favourite song to stay on track. "Don't tell my heart, my achy breaky heart. I just don't think he'd understand."

An agonising hour after I set off I'm at the bus shelter. There's a man there. He's reading a newspaper. Why are you here? Go away. Go away, you nasty man. Why do you have to catch this bus? I'm catching this bus.

I watch him from the corner of my eye and sit as far away from him as I can. He ignores me. I jump as he turns a page. He's reading the finance bit. No one reads the finance bit. He's pretending to read it so he can strike when I least expect it.

But I have a bigger problem. The bus. The driver won't accept coins. He'll ask why I don't have a travel pass and refuse to let me on. My breath is short and fast. Why am I doing this? "Exposure can acclimatise a person to almost anything." What a crock. What does she think I'm going to get out of this insane rollick?

The bus arrives and I freeze. The newspaper killer gets on and it leaves. I can't tell you how relieved I feel. Someone approaches and I look at my lap as they pass by.

The next bus comes and I get onto it. I panic and walk straight past the driver. There's a ticket machine just behind him. I want to pretend to put something in it and reach into my pocket but there's nothing there but my space blanket and keys and wallet. I clench my teeth, expecting him to swear at me and throw me onto the street.

"Oy!"

It's still a shock.

"Where's your ticket?"

I mumble. He screams at me. "What'd you say? Pay or get off, kid."

I shake so hard I can't take out my wallet. Someone takes me by the shoulder and I yelp. Now my breathing's so hard I can't see. I fall backwards and something hits my butt (*sits down*). Vision returns and there's someone with the driver, then she turns and walks right up to me. "You okay?"

I nod. She smiles in this perfunctory way and disappears behind me. I have no idea what just happened. The driver has stopped yelling at me and the only three people on the bus are nowhere near me and everything seems, well, placid. Public transport is not meant to be placid.

We go for ten minutes and my stop comes up. I climb out onto a busy city street and it feels like I'm having major surgery without an anaesthetic. The sound of shouting and car engines cuts through my skin and the polluted air tears my muscles open so the sight of a schizophrenic homeless man can yank my heart right out of its cavity. This is Hell. My psychiatrist has sent me to Hell on a fool's errand to buy... what? Lindt dark chocolate? "Earning your favourite treat will link positive associations to challenging your anxiety."

"You can tell your ma I moved to Arkansas. Or you can tell your dog to bite my leg." I treat myself to a full mouthful of water. I apply some sunscreen. It's hot out here. I can't control the whole world but I *can* block the sun. "Or tell your brother Cliff whose fist can tell my lips. He never really liked me anyway."

When I can breathe enough to move without fainting I stumble to the nearest convenience store. There it is, right at the counter. Lindt dark. I pull out my wallet and go straight up to the guy. I put the Lindt dark in front of him. He says something I'm too stressed to hear and I give him ten and leave.

The bus stop is across the road. I know I'm going to die. The green man appears and I start crossing and there's more people heading towards me than I've seen in my life. Someone's going to push me under a truck. They might not even mean to but either way I'm dead.

Someone bumps into me and I scream. The person in front of me drops his briefcase. I stumble to avoid it and trip. Next thing I know I'm on the ground and the little red man is flashing at me. Death. Death. Death. Black pants. Shoes. Car tyres. Death. A hand reaching for my face. I howl at the top of my voice, "And if you tell my heart, my achy breaky heart, he might blow up and kill this man!"

Everything's inexplicably black. Then slivers of white. Then colour. Then...

Well, it's not the first time I've woken in hospital. I turn my head to the side and my things are all there on the table. I turn away and there's the devil.

She says hi.

"'Exposure can acclimatise a person to almost anything.' Well guess what, Doctor Lawrence. I'm still scared of dying."

She starts speaking and I turn away from her. And there it is. My day from Hell in a thin white box. My breath becomes instantly shallow, quick. "Where's my mum?"

"She's getting coffee."

"Can you go get her?"

"Of course."

"And don't ever come back."

"I'm sorry?"

"I want a new doctor."

I turn to look at the chocolate and my whole body shakes with terror. "You ruined Lindt dark."