

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Blind City

by Alex Broun

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

Act 1. Isolation

Sounds of a busy city. Lights up on **BRENDA, KEITH, JAMIE** and **STEVE**.

We hear a hum building in the distance. The humming becomes louder and louder.

Suddenly the hum is cut off and the stage is illuminated by a brilliant flash of white light.
Blackout.

Lights come back up on **STEVE**. He checks around then goes to the back wall. He pulls out a piece of red chalk and scrawls on the wall:

STEVE : (WRITING AS HE SPEAKS)
 “ In the midway of this our mortal life,
 I found me in a gloomy wood astray.”
 (TO AUDIENCE) Did you see that light the other night ? The blinding flash.
 Incredible wasn't it. I was up on the roof, hanging out some laundry. I was
 standing right on the edge, looking out over the park. Bats screaming in the trees.
 Then it happened. This huge brilliant light in the sky. Bloody thing almost
 swallowed me up. Then afterwards -silence. This beautiful silence. I couldn't talk.
 Made me forget about myself, forget. For a whole five minutes.
 You see recently I've become obsessed with the idea of killing myself. I have
 these fantasies about a train slicing me in two, my guts spilling all over the
 track. Or throwing myself off a tall building – or not so tall building -
 smashing my body on the concrete below.
 I don't think the anti-depressants are working. Maybe I should increase my
 dosage. Six a day probably isn't really enough. The problem is I'm just really
 depressed. I mean really, really depressed. But I'm not letting it get me down.
 (HE SMILES) In fact I've come to a decision. It came to me in the flash. Well
 I saw it in the flash. The graffiti. On the wall, across from my building,
 scrawled in red paint:
 (READS FROM WALL) “In the midway of this our mortal life
 I found me in a gloomy wood astray.”
 Dante. Inferno. You know ? Inferno.
STEVE: (CONT) So in that moment – when I saw those words - I thought: “Why not ?
 If I go through nine circles of hell maybe I can get a little Paradise too.”
 “Through me you pass into the city of woe
 All hope abandon, ye who enter here.”
 But pass through here we must to attain paradise.

HE CLICKS HIS FINGERS. LIGHTS CHANGE

KEITH ENTERS.

STEVE: “And lo ! Toward us in a bark comes an old man !”
 Hoary, white with eld, crying “Woe to you,
 Wicked spirits ! Hope not ever to see the sky again.”

1. GOLDILOCKS.

ART GALLERY. 2am.

KEITH IS THE SECURITY GUARD.

KEITH: I like it here among the paintings. Quiet, peaceful, warm. Funny word that - art. Add an f an what do you get ? Fart. That's what my father used to say. He didn't go much on art. Another one, gone to god. They're all gone now. Mum, Eric, Betty, Tom. All gone. Except me.
I've been asking for overtime of late. I need to be here at the moment. Among the warm glow. My wife, Drie, went too you see a couple of months ago and I'm not bearing up too well. We were married for 27 years come Christmas. They say four months is the danger time. It's about then when things start to get tricky. At first I didn't think it would. I thought I'd be one of the lucky ones. But it's around then you really start to miss them and you begin to realise how empty your life is without them. You begin to understand the real meaning of the word loneliness.

It's all to be expected of course. It's always hardest for the one who remains. The other one sits on a cloud, sipping nice cups of tea, with cream and sugar, while you're stuck down here, among all the tears and memories. Hope they do
KEITH: (CONT) have tea in heaven. She always loved a good cuppa. Not too hot, not too cold, just right. Like Goldilocks with her bowl of porridge. That's who she was to me. My very own Goldilocks. Have a cup for me love.

That's what I reckon that flash was all about. I was up in the canteen, on me break. It was so bright it went right through the whole building. Like an xray. They said it was dry lightning. Lightning out of a cloudless sky ? I never seen lightning like that. Then they said it was some build up of static electricity due to the new power station. But I reckon it was something else. (WHISPERING) I reckon it was them over there - sending us a sign that they were okay. Saying hello. It was Drie. Telling me I'm not alone.

Things like that happen. You get little signs and you gotta be aware of them. Like this bloke the other day. He was standing in front of the Magritte for hours, with this intense look on his face. I thought at first that he was, pardon the expression, a little barmy. We get them in here some days, trying to scribble on the Picasso. He wasn't like that though. In fact, he was quite the opposite. "Purify". That was his first word. Not a "Hello" or "What's the time ?", or even "What's this one called ?" Just "Purify." Then he went on. "Sit with it. Go through it. Emerge cleansed." Then he stopped for awhile. Went all silent. And then he said, real quiet like: "Begin now." Then he picked up his bag and just walked off. "Purify. Emerge cleansed. Begin now." Heady stuff. I remember it cause I wrote it down on the back of a piece of newspaper and stuck it in my wallet. I take it out and look at it from time to time. Especially at night. It helps me sleep. Not sure why. But it helps me nod off. I don't who he was or where he come from but I'll tell you something, I think that chap had a direct line to him up there. You're gonna think I'm crazy but I think he was some kind of angel sent down to help me out. Those words he said, and the flash, they've given me renewed faith. And nothing, nothing on earth, is more important than that.

You see, that light cleansed us all. It's given me courage to go on. To wake up each morning and try to smile. But

never forget she's there with me. Watching, laughing –gazing down at me through the flash. Sit with it. Go through it. Emerge cleansed. Begin now.
KEITH EXITS.

STEVE: “Now let us to the blind world there beneath descend
 I go the first and thou shalt follow next
 And entering lead you with me, on the bounds
 Of the first circle that surrounds the abyss.
 Suspended in that Limbo many a soul of mighty worth”

JAMIE ENTERS, FEELING HER WAY WITH A CANE.

STEVE: “There mark'd I Helen, for whose sake so long
 The time was fraught with evil”

2. Beer and Newspaper

JAMIE: How we met.
 I left work at 7.45pm exactly as usual. I came down the stairs of the hospital and walked across Macquarie Street and into Martin Place, past the fountain trickling on my left and the smell of garbage at the cafe where I buy my lunch. As I reached the corner of Bridge Street, I felt a slight cool breeze, ruffling my hair – and a warm glow on my face, like someone had lit a match - then silence. No cars, no traffic lights, no people. Nothing, except the trickling of the fountain. Then suddenly an explosion of sound.
 A woman screaming - car horns, drowning each other out. Footsteps, a man's footsteps, running towards me. I'm knocked to the footpath by a middle aged man in a thick jacket. He grabbed my hand and tried to pull me up. “Leave me alone. I'm alright. You're the one who's confused. I know exactly where I'm going.”
 I check my watch. 7.57pm. I had three minutes to get to my bus stop. He'd be waiting. But first I had to get across Bridge Street and the lights have stopped working. I couldn't hear any cars moving so I stepped on to the road. It was unsafe I know but all I was thinking is that I have two minutes to get to my bus stop or he'll be gone. I took another tentative step. Ten more quick steps and I reached the other side. Now it was 7.59. One minute ! I walked quickly down the slope to Elizabeth Street and made it to my bus stop. Eight o'clock exactly. But where was he ?

JAMIE: (CONT) Where was the man who smells of beer? Not badly - he's not an alcoholic - just a faint smell. One or two after his hard day at the stock exchange. And he always has a paper which he reads on the bus. That's why I christened him Beer and newspaper. Before I knew his real name. Now it was 8.02. I had missed the bus. But no. Surely it had been delayed. But then where was he? Chanel and leather bag was there, standing on my right. She catches the bus two before mine at 7.58 and she was still there. My bus must've still been coming. 8.07. Chanel and leather bag sat next to me. “Did you see the flash ? What did you think it was ?” I did not answer. I sensed her embarrassment as she sees the cane I'm holding in my hand. 8.12. Still no beer and newspaper.

Cigar and umbrella arrived. Almost fifteen minutes late. "Somebody said they've blown up the Opera House" I heard him say. "If they've blown up the Opera House why didn't we hear the bang?" replied Chanel and leather bag. 8.20. I couldn't bear it. Where was he?

Someone else began to speak. He shouldn't have been at my bus stop. "I reckon it was a nuclear bomb." What was he doing at my bus stop? "One of those ones that just blows up the people and leaves all the buildings standing." 8.28pm! I was going to scream. He'd caught a taxi home or worse still he'd been hurt in the flash.

Then suddenly I heard it - about a block away. A bus. Where is beer and newspaper? The bus stopped. The doors open. Was it my bus? I'm just about to ask Cigar when at last - the rustle of newspaper and the faint smell of beer. Only one tonight. 8.32. Beer and newspaper had arrived. I could feel him looking at me. Play it cool. Blind and independent is mysterious, sexy. Blind and needy is pathetic. "I see you made it." Was he talking to me? "I was worried about you." "Don't worry about me" I thought to myself, "it's everybody else who's running around like fucking idiots." But then beer laughed and I suddenly realised that I said it out loud. I was embarrassed but I could feel a smile growing on my face. "Well that's alright then." Beer and newspaper was worried about me. Another bus pulled up. "Come on" he said, "that's us." That's us. I felt him gently take my arm.

JAMIE: (CONT) Together we walked over to the kerb and stepped up on to the bus.

JAMIE EXITS.

STEVE: If they had a competition for the most depressed person in the world I'm absolutely sure I'd win. Or at least come a close second. My sister would come first. She's depressed too. She's been in therapy for six years but her psychiatrist isn't as expensive as mine. It's not much fun this greyness. I think it's a family trait. An overabundance of angst. Strindberg, Van Gogh, Beckett and Morrissey all rolled into one. Maybe I should just die. But what if you still get depressed even after you're dead? Think about it. I mean what do you do then? I don't think the pharmacy in heaven is that flush with anti-depressants. And you can't commit suicide. You're already dead.

BRENDA ENTERS, CARRYING A TRAY OF SANDWICHES.

STEVE: "From the first circle I descend thus
Down to the second,
There I saw Electra, accompanied by many"

3. PARTY 1

Drinks Party. 9pm.

BRENDA: They're fucking. Not right now, but they are fucking. How did I know? Put it this way, it wasn't hard to guess. I know what you're thinking. I'm just being paranoid. Final confirmation came the night of the flash. I came in to collect him from the office and surprise, surprise. She was