Top Class Theatre Studies

Olive Weeks monologue transcript

*Carrying Shoes into the Unknown* by Rosemary Johns.

Prescribed edition: Australian Script Centre Inc, trading as AustralianPlays.org, Hobart 2006
Monologue from Scenes One, Two, Seventeen, pp. 6, 9, 36-37

What is this place? Where are Mum and Dad? They should be here. I'm sweating with fear. Stop panicking, Alice. Get a grip. Breathe. Look. Plastic. New. It's an airport. You are fine. They will turn up. They always do. Breathe.

All those thousands of people in black...some massive political demonstration on the runway. There must be someone important on the plane. No one's, no one's interested in you.

What about the American guy? Coming out of nowhere, grabbing me in his arms, pushing through the crowds screaming, pushing, shoving. 'Honey, come to my hotel, this is no place for a girl.'

My parents are here...somewhere.

'Are you blind, sweetheart? There's not one Western face here.'

I'll be fine. They'll be here.

'You're crazy, sweetheart. You should never have left home. This is dangerous. I'd be outta this hell if it weren't for the money. They want to tear us to pieces like confetti.’

I should have gone with him. I lost my chance...What do I do? Do I wait? Do I get a taxi? They've never let me down. They will turn up. I know it. Breathe.

You were right to refuse his offer to stay at his hotel. Anything could have happened. Deep...breaths. You are a grown woman. You've completed two years of nurses training.

And I'm the only Western woman in a totally dysfunctional airport.

There is no wolf under the bed. Five years old looking under every bed for the wolf. There is no wolf. Stop looking for the wolf. Say the rhyme about the baby shoe. Don't be stupid. But the baby shoe protects you. That's why it's cast in brass. Remember the rhyme. The rhyme to stop being scared.

'There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,

A wolf left her baby all battered and chewed,

So off she went to get baby a coffin,

But when she came back...baby was laughin'?

[laughs]

Why did Dad teach me such a weird rhyme at five years old? Both my parents are seriously weird. I'll forgive you if you just turn up. I'll forgive you everything, for not letting me wear makeup, for vetting my boyfriends. There are no phones. There's no electricity. Just come. Mum always insists on arriving hours early. What's happened to them? Some car accident? Something bad.

Ugh, take charge! What what would they say Manly Hospital? 'Grit your teeth, Alice, and wash the bed pans'. I'm gritting my teeth...with a smile. I'm up shit creek!

Forget the suitcase, it ain't coming. The airport's broken down... Outside. Taxis!

Excuse me, please can you - … He spat at me.

Please can you... this address... Old Shimran Road? Do you...do you speak English? … No need to swear at me.

What would Sister Mackey do? 'You're not bleeding, you're not dead. You must be right as rain.'

Not for hire? No? There's no one else here. Why won't you take me?

Oh, one of them's walking towards me. Have, have all my money... if you take me.

[Sigh]

Safe! Four cabs. Four bastards. Go to hell! Why is he looking at me in the car mirror? Look away. Why is he driving so slowly? There's a man in dark clothes on the corner. Please don't pick him up.

Don't let him see the fear. Maybe this is what Iranians do at 2am in the morning. Share cabs. I am not a victim. I am a passenger in a taxi...No! Please, please! Don't stop again!

Old Shimran Road, Shimram Road, Old…Old Shimran Road [Screaming]

Answer, will you! Answer, please, please HELP ME!!! [sobbing]

Never go to shut-up places where the walls crowd in on you. Pushing you in the darkness. Round and round and round. 'Til you can no longer stand you are crawling on your hands and belly in the pitch-black. Stifling heat. Gasping for breath.

Then light. Air. Crawl out... an enclosed area and... way down... ants crawling in the courtyard below. What if the ants should look up and see? Black snakes twisting around my feet...Microphone cords. To trap breath, to send breath to the ants below. So the ants will look up and see us. Capture us. Shredding with care every fragment of skin and bone. Somebody's pushing me back into the darkness and I am falling into the blackness.

And then we're outside walking in the sun. Mum a mirage.

[Interpretation Statement]

Note: not included in video

My interpretation of Alice from Rosemary John’s ‘Carrying Shoes into the Unknown’, was informed by the original context of the play; the intense political and social climate of the Iranian Revolution between 1977-1979. My key aim is to honour Johns by addressing the political theme of the play, mainly focusing on humanising the events of the Iranian Revolution, confronting my contemporary audience unapologetically with the universal human response to a threatening environment. The eclectic style allowed me to draw predominantly on conventions of realism, inherent in the language of the playscript, and Epic Theatre, given the didactic messages Johns aims to convey. A key influence on Rosemary Johns being her own personal experience, making Alice’s story semi-autobiographical, further informed my duty as an actor to interpret this monologue with an emotional sensitivity and vulnerability in a realistic and human manner. Thus, I apply nuanced physical characterisation to convey emotional quality and meaning through facial expression, voice and gesture; psychologically and emotionally driving the monologue. Furthermore, through varying tension, energy levels and my use of the space, I was able to characterise Alice’s response to her situation similarly to the way we would see someone realistically respond to panic, fear and anxiety; notably through variation in breath.

I also appealed to the Brechtian nature of the playscript by confronting and involving my audience directly with the political and social conflict in which Alice finds herself, adhering to the didactic nature of the play. Directorially, employing emphasis for certain moments also aided in conveying to my politically engaged target audience significant language in developing their understanding of the context and political themes. For example, when I zip up my dress and say ‘only western woman’. Moreover, to aid in building and sustaining an audience understanding of the setting, I employ motion and manipulate my use of the space in a way which creates a clear visual image for them.

Informed by Alice’s relationship with Amir and her evident self-growth and discovery throughout the plot, as I director I wanted to convey a contrast in her characterisation and tone during the monologue’s excerpt from scene 17. Interpreting the final moments as a trance-like reflection on Alice’s discovery and subconscious upon being ‘carried into the unknown’, I want to demonstrate how whilst she still experiences moments of ‘light, air’; escapism to a place devoid of conflict, she now confronts her reality face on without her previous veil of ignorance.