

To Jump From A Burning Building

By Pete Malicki

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A monologue with mime

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Time: Daytime

Place: A hospital room

Set: A comatose woman lies in a hospital bed. A chair is beside her. Stark and sterile.

Cast

Sally	45, female, narrates the play. Cynical and worn out.
Sally's body	Sally's comatose body on life support on a hospital bed. As similar in appearance to Sally as possible. Non speaking.
Leila	20. Sally's daughter. Skinny and sickly. Non speaking.
Kyle	18-25 male. Non speaking.
Nurse	30. Male. Non speaking.

Setting

A hospital. Sally's body is lying comatose on a hospital bed. Another actor plays Sally's embodied consciousness, who essentially acts as a narrator. There is a chair beside the bed.

SCENE ONE

Leila is sitting next to Sally's body, sobbing quietly with her head on the pillow. Sally stands a few metres away from the scene, watching neutrally.

SALLY: Let's play 20 questions. Is it an animal, a mineral, or a vegetable?

That girl there wetting my pillow is my 20-year-old daughter. She comes in about once a month to see if she's any closer to inheriting. Don't think ill of her though; those tears she's shedding are genuine. Leila is a battered wife, or should I say, a battered de facto. "It's only when he's really stressed," she says, but the truth is she's got no means to survive without him. Can you really blame her for wanting me to die?

Sometimes Leila uses her fingers to open my eyes and I can see her face. She doesn't know I can see her or hear her, but I can. I've watched her become sadder and sallow as the months go by. She used to be vibrant, healthy. Weighed at least 10 kilos more than this waif of a thing beside me. And it's not just her body that's been shrivelling up and wasting away. Her smile went AWOL almost half a year ago and hasn't been seen since. Would you believe that the guy who's beating her's name is Bobby? Fucking Bobby. I'm waiting for them to move to a trailer park and complete the cliché.

Leila gets up, kisses Sally's body's cheek, takes a cigarette out of her pocket and leaves.

SALLY: Bye honey. Sometimes I wonder why she doesn't just smother me and be done with it. She would inherit my house and two people's suffering would be over. Ha, I'd hate to think what Bobby would do to her if he found out about the affair she started in October!

I've been here for fourteen months now in this state of non-life, this year-long dream. Do you have any idea what you can achieve in that time? I could've met someone, married him, fallen pregnant and had a child. Or I could have become a qualified masseuse. Or defrauded my workplace, laundered the money and done the time. I could be an ex-con millionaire by now. Instead, here I am lying around in suspended animation.

Kyle enters and hesitantly approaches the bed.

SALLY: Ah, my favourite young man. I get a visit from this one anywhere between daily and monthly, which I suspect revolves around his travel schedule. My comatose body is the altar for his guilt and he comes to pray for forgiveness every chance he gets.

Kyle sits down and drops his head.

SALLY: So this guy is sitting here one day after months of visits when a girl comes in. I never see her because my eyes are shut but she says, "Kyle. What's this?"

I don't like the sound of her voice. Believe me, after relying on nothing more than my hearing for most of this time, I'm a good judge of tone.

Kyle says, "It's no one." They have a bit of a back-and-forth then he says: "One of my uni friends worked here half a year ago and told me about her. She came across an unmarked video tape, right, which she put in and started watching. It was a movie which is *so* compelling that anyone who watches it becomes fatally hooked. They are so drawn in that they won't eat, sleep, or even move, and they just keep watching it until they die. Some neighbours could hear her TV at two AM so they came bashing at her door and ended up sucked in to the movie too. They're dead now. Only reason she's alive is because another neighbour turned the power off to her unit and she was found like this a day or two later. She's the only person who's ever seen the thing and survived. I just had to come and check her out. This woman here – she's in a coma because she saw the perfect piece of entertainment. Can you believe that? Can you imagine watching something so powerful it kills you?"

Kyle starts sobbing noiselessly.

SALLY: I've read the book he got that from but *she* was stupid enough to believe him. Probably a good thing for their relationship because I'm not sure how she'd feel about Kyle if she knew he ran me down last year. He was using his iPhone to forward a picture of an Asian couple who'd been caught having sex in their car. Funny thing to lose your life over, isn't it? I mean, what if they'd decided to do it in a hotel where no one could take a photo? Would I still be here right now? Or would Kyle have been texting a mate about footy scores instead and mowed me down all the same?

The thing that irks me most about this kid is his remorse. He damned well knew that what he was doing could lead to this outcome but the little prick still has the nerve to apologise. How dare he be sorry! How dare he ask me to forgive him for such wilful negligence. He forfeited that privilege. When

you do something like this to another human being – when you destroy their life because of an act of pure stupidity – you don't deserve any forgiveness. You need to wear it on your soul until you burn in the fires of Hell.

Sally composes herself.

SALLY: Okay, sorry about that. You'd think I'd be over it by now, but I'm not. That's the downside of being cogent. I have nothing better to do than let the bitterness well up.

There is a noise offstage and Kyle perks up. He hurries to the door just as Nurse enters. They make eye contact and pause for a long moment, then Kyle hurries offstage with his head down.

During the following dialogue, Nurse checks Sally's body's vital signs and equipment and fusses around.

SALLY: You could slice the tension in the air with a knife when those two get together. Both of them kind of know what the other is responsible for but neither of them wants to address it. If only they'd have a nice little fight to the death for me.

The funny thing about this whole coma thing is that there hasn't been a single "switch-her-off" conversation in my presence the entire time I've been here. Not once. I'll very happily switch off, thank you for asking. No need to fight over what God's going to do with me. Anytime you want to flick that fucking switch, feel free! I don't much care who gets my car and my necklaces and my handbag collection. It's all just junk to a dead person.

Nurse climbs onto the bed and moves the sheet aside. Sally goes quiet and looks away. Nurse pulls his trousers down and has sex with Sally's body for 30 seconds, orgasms quietly, gets dressed and climbs down. He wipes her with a tissue then hurries out of the room. Sally is silent for a long moment after he leaves.

SALLY: Can you imagine watching something so powerful it kills you? I've had to stomach the nauseating contrition of the kid who ran me over and the heartbreak of what my daughter's going through, but I died inside the first time that happened. When you ask me if I want to wake up, are you so shocked to hear me say "no"? Would you gasp if I wrapped my hands around my own neck and choked the last few drops of life out of this corpse that I am?

Imagine that you're trapped on the fiftieth floor of a burning building. You don't want to jump; it's certain death if you do. But what choice do you have? Stay there and be incinerated? As the fire approaches, you reach a point where jumping seems like the better option. The only option. This is where I'm at right now, ladies and gentleman, but I don't have the option of jumping. I'm trapped in a burning building and I have nowhere to go. I cannot jump.

Leila returns after having had a cigarette outside. She sits down beside Sally's body and holds her hand for a moment. Sally watches her.

SALLY: Come on, honey. I'm so frail. It would only take ten seconds. Just imagine my throat is a jar of pickles. You've brought it home from the store and it's stuck. Completely stuck. You need to squeeze it and twist it as hard as you can. Your muscles are straining with the effort.

As if hearing Sally's words, Leila slowly puts her hands around Sally's body's throat.

SALLY: Yes! That's it. Do it! Help me jump from that building, honey. Set me free. Kill me and we can both be happy.

There's a noise offstage and Leila sits up quickly. Nurse enters the stage and stops, looking at Leila. Leila stands. Nurse approaches her. When they are close, she throws her arms around his shoulders and kisses him. He smiles, kisses her back, then puts his arm around her waist and leads her offstage. Sally is disgusted.

SALLY: You can flick that fucking switch off now please.