

Pushed

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a short play

By

Alex Broun

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Email: abroun@bigpond.net.au

www.alexbroun.com

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Characters

RILEY PURDON	A mountain climber
JENNA PURDON	His wife and fellow climber
SOREN MASTERS	An experienced climber
JETT MEYER	An inexperienced climber
DAN BREA	The leader of the expedition

Time

May, 1999.

Setting

Mount Hood, Oregon, USA.

This play is based on actual events on the mountain in May, 1999.

Pushed

RILEY, SOREN, DAN AND JENNA APPEAR IN SPOTLIGHTS.

FAST AND INTENSE.

RILEY: We have to do it !

DAN: What you are talking about –

JENNA: It's us or him.

DAN: It's against everything -

SOREN: Us or him.

DAN: We believe in.

RILEY: There is no other way.

SOREN: He's brought it –

JENNA: On himself.

RILEY: He's endangered –

SOREN: All of our lives.

DAN: There has to be another way.

JENNA, RILEY, SOREN: There isn't.

LIGHTS CHANGE. THE CLIMBERS ARE GETTING READY TO CLIMB, PREPARING THEIR EQUIPMENT, GETTING DRESSED.

DAN: People die on Mount Hood.

JENNA: It's just what happens.

SOREN: People talk about K2.

DAN: Everest

RILEY: Anna Purna.

JETT: Nanga Parbat in Kashmir

SOREN: The Man Eater

DAN: But Mount Hood is a killer as well.

RILEY: Just ask Kelly James,
JENNA: Brian Hall
JETT: And Nikko Cooke.
SOREN: More than 130 people have died on the mountain since records started to be kept in 1896.
RILEY: You know that before you start
JENNA: You have to be aware
SOREN: Of all the dangers
DAN: The Multnomah tribe call the mountain – Wy'east.
SOREN: It's a stratovolcano
RILEY: In the Cascade Volcanic Arc
JENNA: Of Northern Oregon.
DAN: That's in the US.
JENNA: Mount Hood's snow-covered peak rises 11,249 feet
RILEY: And is home to twelve glaciers.
JETT: (LOOKING UP) It's beautiful.
DAN: (TO JETT) Wait till you get up there. There's five in our climbing party.
RILEY: Riley Purdon 31.
DAN: His wife
JENNA: Jenna, 39. Guess you could call me a cradle snatcher.
DAN: Then there's –
SOREN: Soren Masters,
DAN: Another experienced climber and –
JETT: Jett Meyer. That's Jett – with two T's. I'm a skier.
DAN: Jett's a friend of a friend. He wants to go up the mountain so I'm taking him. It's his first climb - and that's where I come in. Dan

DAN: (CONT) Brea, professional climbing guide. I've been up and down this mountain so many times I could do it in my sleep.

SOREN: He has probably has.

DAN: It's my job to get everybody up and down in one piece. (TO **JETT**) And the first lesson is you never take the mountain for granted. You treat every climb like it's your first. (TO AUDIENCE) Even if it's your thousandth – and something.

JETT APPROACHES JENNA.

JETT: I'm Jett. All the way from NYC.

JENNA: Jenna. And over there – that's Riley, my *husband*.

JETT: Good day for it.

JENNA: Looks okay but the weather can change fast on the mountain. I've seen it before.

JETT: No problems.

JENNA: Hey, your carabiner is hanging loose.

JETT: My what ?

JENNA: Your carabiner. (BEAT) On your harness.

JETT: Oh right. Thanks for the heads up.

JETT MOVES AWAY

DAN: (TO CLIMBERS) This morning we're climbing up the south side.

RILEY: We start here at Timberline Lodge,

JENNA: then proceed up Palmer Glacier,

SOREN: Till we reach Crater Rock,

DAN: then it's across Coalman glacier

JETT: Riding the Hogsback

RILEY: And into the Berghsrund.

SOREN: Then it's through the Pearly Gates –

JENNA: and up to the Summit.

- DAN: We'll take the West Crater Rim. It'll take a little longer but it's safer. When the sun gets up snow can get pretty soft.
- JETT: Why don't we take the Cooper Spur ?
- SOREN: You know how many people have died on the Cooper Spur, especially on the descent ?
- RILEY: Thirteen – and that's just the ones we know.
- DAN: (TO CLIMBERS) It's 4.30am. Sun it'll be up in a few hours. Let's make tracks. I'll lead – Jett you're behind me then Jenna, Riley and Soren. We head up the mountain.

THEY START TO CLIMB.

- DAN: About an hour in - I hear Jett behind me making a hell of a racket.
- JETT: (CALLS) Woo-hoo – I'm the king of the mountain, The king of the world.
- DAN: At first I think he's just excited being up here. Letting off some steam. But then my rope is yanked so hard I topple backwards. I look back to see Jett jumping up and down like some kind of –
- SOREN: Lunatic.
- JETT: (CALLS) Woo-hoo – I'm the king of the mountain.
- DAN: (TO **JETT**) Hey Jett. Shut up, shut up. What's wrong ?
- JETT: Nothing's wrong man. I'm just excited to be up here. This is amazing. So beautiful.
- DAN: You do that further up we're all going to be in trouble.
- JETT: Okay man. Okay.
- JENNA: (COMING UP TO THEM) He keeps jumping up and down like that he's going to bring an avalanche down on us.
- JETT: It's cool babe. I'm cool.
- JENNA: I'm not your babe.
- DAN: (TO **RILEY**) Maybe we should go back.
- RILEY: Nothing you can't handle Danny.

DAN: I don't know - he's pretty wild.

RILEY: Jenna and me are climbing McKinley in two weeks. This is an important part of our training She'll be pretty disappointed.

DAN: We could go back – drop him off. Come back tomorrow.

RILEY: We gotta drive home tomorrow. You're Danny Brea. No juiced up city kid is gonna blow you off your stride.

DAN NOD. CASEY MOVES AWAY.

DAN: "Juiced up." And so we go on.

THEY CLIMB AGAIN.

DAN: And there's no problems for the next few hours. But due to Jett we have to keep stopping every twenty minutes. When I go back to check what's wrong. He's huffing and puffing, eyes crazy. (TO **JETT**) You okay ?

JETT: (GASPING) Loving it.

DAN: You're having trouble breathing.

JETT: I'll be okay. Just use to training at sea level.

DAN: (TO AUDIENCE) An hour or so later we're finally making our way along the Hogsback - when suddenly I hear a scream behind me.

JENNA SCREAMS.

DAN: Jett – no Jenna ! Suddenly the rope yanks me and I start to slide down the mountain, it's a thousand feet straight down to Coalman. I pull out my ice axe and drive it into the glacier wall. It bounces off. I strike again – it sticks. I'm hanging there a thousand feet up. I take out a camalot and prise it into a gap. I lock on my carabiner. It's good. I turn my head and gaze downwards. To my right I see Jenna – she's swinging in the air, desperately trying to grab the glacier wall. Riley is back up on the Hogsback. He's holding Jenna's rope and Soren is securing him. I turn my head a little more and there below is our problem - Jett – he's hanging off his rope about 50 feet below Jenna – bouncing off the wall.

JETT: Woo – hoo ! Woo – hoo !

DAN: He should be terrified but he's screaming at the top of his voice like he's on some Disney land fun ride.

JETT: I'm the King of the World!

DAN: I look over to Jenna. She's fumbling for something in her pack. What she's doing ? She's gotta knife. (TO JENNA) Jenna – what are you doing ?

JENNA: I'm gonna fall.

DAN: You're not gonna fall. Riley's got you and Soren.

JENNA: I can't hold him.

DAN: Everything's okay. Just put that back in your pack.

BEAT. JENNA PUTS THE KNIFE AWAY.

DAN: Now gently swing yourself over to the wall. Try and find a foothold.

JENNA: I can't. He keeps swinging me out.

DAN: (CALLS) Jett, Jett.

JETT: This is amazing man. Greatest buzz ever.

DAN: Jett – I need you to float nice and gentle for me now. Nice and gentle. Can you do that?

JETT: (FLAPPING HIS ARMS) Like a bird.

DAN: Nice and gentle. Just float.

JETT: (HOLDING HIS ARMS STILL) Float, float.

DAN: Okay Jenna – can you reach the wall now.

JENNA FINDS A FOOTHOLD.

JENNA: I got it.

DAN: Good girl. Now lock yourself in nice and tight.

JENNA: I'm doing it.

DAN: Okay – you good ?

JENNA: I'm good.

DAN: Riley – you got your lovely wife?

RILEY: I got her.

DAN: Okay Soren – now you come over to me and throw me down a rope.

SOREN: (LOWERING ROPE) What are you gonna do ?

DAN: I'm gonna lasso this city boy.

DAN MAKES THE ROPE INTO A NOOSE.

RILEY: Danny, what are you doing ?

DAN: I gotta get a rope around him.

RILEY: That's not our problem.

DAN: Riley – he's hanging 1000 feet above a glacier.

RILEY: Brought it on himself.

DAN: We can't leave him there.

RILEY: My wife is down there.

DAN: Riley – calm down.

SOREN: Danny – he has a point. If he doesn't want to be saved. You can't save him.

DAN: I'm not losing a man – not on my climb.

JETT: Woo hoo. Woo hoo !

DAN: (TO AUDIENCE) And right then – at the worse possible moment – Jett starts to flap around again.

JETT: I'm flying Dad. I'm flying.

DAN: Every flap tugs on Jenna's rope, threatening to rip her away from the mountain. And my camalot starts to move, trying to ease itself out the rock.

JENNA: I'm cutting him loose.

DAN: Jenna – no.

RILEY: We have to do it !

DAN: What you are talking about –

JENNA: It's us or him.

DAN: It's against everything -

SOREN: Us or him.

DAN: We believe in.

RILEY: There is no other way.

SOREN: He's brought it –

JENNA: On himself.

RILEY: He's endangered –

SOREN: All of our lives.

DAN: There has to be another way.

JENNA, RILEY, SOREN: There isn't.

DAN: Please ! Don't do this. It's cold blooded murder. I got you up this mountain and I promise to get you down. All of you.

BEAT. HE LOWERS THE ROPE DOWN OVER JETT.

DAN: Thankfully Jett stopped flapping about. If he started flapping again Jenna might've cut him loose – and I wouldn't have been able to stop her. Took me twenty minutes but finally I got him. Hogtied him like a calf. He wasn't going anywhere. (CALLS) Okay, I got him. Soren, you got us.

SOREN: I'm good.

DAN: Jenna, you may cut your rope.

JENNA: Thank Jesus for that.

JENNA CUTS THE ROPE ATTACHED TO JETT.

RILEY: I'm pulling you up babe.

JENNA: Can't wait for that.

DAN: And I watched as Riley slowly winched the love of his life up the mountain. Slowly making her way back to her husband. But just as she reached the top she stopped securing herself with the axe. I went to call out to her but just as I opened my mouth to speak – it happened. Riley let go of the rope to take her in his arms but just at that moment the snow beneath him gave a little and he skidded towards the edge. He reached out for his wife to

DAN: (CONT) stop himself falling but she was no longer secured and the force of him grabbing her ripped her hand away from the rope.

RILEY EMBRACES JENNA. LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE ON THEM.

DAN: Soren and I watched helplessly as they toppled over the edge and fell silently 2000 feet to the glacier floor below.

JETT: Woo hoo ! Woo hoo ! You see that. They went all the way down. Amazing. Beautiful. So beautiful.

SOREN: Cut his rope Dan. Cut his goddam rope or I will.

DAN: (TO AUDIENCE) But I didn't, And neither did Soren. And slowly together we got Jett back on to the Hogsback.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

DAN: Four hours later Soren and I managed to get Jett back down to Timberline Lodge. We had to carry him most of the way.

SOREN: It was the hardest descent of my life. I wanted to kill him with every single step. He had murdered two of my best friends.

DAN: But we got him there. And Soren never returned to Mount Hood again.

SOREN: I still climb I just could never go back to Mount Hood.

SOREN LEAVES THE STAGE.

DAN: (HOLDING UP CRAMPONS) In both cases the crampons were found to be at fault. Jett had taken his off –

JETT: I wanted to feel the snow under my feet.

DAN: And Riley had kept his on. The softening the snow had balled up under his feet, leading to the fatal slip. Jett went back to New York.

JETT: Thanks for the climb man. Sorry about your friends.

JETT HOLDS OUT HIS HAND. DAN DOESN'T SHAKE IT.

DAN: He never even came back for the enquiry. His fancy lawyer friends in NYC made sure of that.

JETT: It wasn't like I pushed them.

JETT LEAVES THE STAGE.

SPOTLIGHT ON DAN.

DAN: After three weeks the board rendered their decision: "We find Dan Brea without fault. There were no gross errors in judgment". No gross errors in judgement. Taking a guy who'd never climbed a tree, let alone a Mountain, up Mount Hood is hard enough. Harder still when he's loaded up on a couple of grams of a very different snow. Found his backpack in my office after he'd left. (HOLDING UP PACKET) Anyone want to buy some high quality Colombian Marching powder? But then he was paying three times my normal fee – did I forget to mention that ?

SPOTLIGHTS COME UP ON RILEY AND JENNA.

IN ANOTHER SPOTLIGHT IS JETT.

DAN: Justice and mountain climbing don't have an easy kinship. If they did – good people wouldn't die on the mountain, and bad people would. But it doesn't work like that. Like I said at the start - people die on Mount Hood. It's just what happens.

DAN EXITS.

LIGHT FADES ON RILEY AND JENNA AND JETT.

BLACKOUT.