

Immersion Therapy

by

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Setting

A living room.

Time

The present.

Cast

DOUG - A man in his late 20s-40s.
MELISSA - A woman in her late 20s-40s.
DROPPPO - A clown of indeterminate age.

(In a typical living room, MELISSA sits reading a travel magazine. When she hears a car pull up and a door slam outside, she stands up, smoothing her clothes, clearly excited. The door opens and DOUG enters.)

MELISSA

Hi hon!

DOUG

There she is!

(DOUG comes towards MELISSA, wraps her up in a big hug and kisses her.)

DOUG

Happy Birthday, sweetheart! How's your day been so far?

MELISSA

It's been okay. Nothing special...yet.

(She looks at him expectantly. He feigns ignorance.)

MELISSA

Well...?

DOUG

Well what?

MELISSA

You'd better be kidding.

DOUG

About what?

MELISSA

Oh my God. Don't do this to me.

DOUG

I'm not sure I follow you.

MELISSA

My present? An amazing, one-of-a-kind, incredible birthday present!

DOUG

Oh...that's right. I usually try to get you a little something for your birthday, don't I?

MELISSA

A little something? A signed first edition of *Ulysses* by James Joyce? Skydiving over the Mojave Desert at sunset? Dinner at The French Laundry? Honey, your presents...my girlfriends want to slit my throat when they hear what you get me for my birthday.

DOUG

Well, birthdays are special. They should be special.

MELISSA

So what is it this year? Can I guess?

DOUG

Now honey, you know that every year it gets harder and harder to do something amazing, right?

MELISSA

Not for you.

DOUG

Well, I do my best, but I just want you to know that if I'm going to keep up the standards, I need to start thinking more and more outside the box.

MELISSA

Oh my God...it's going to be...just tell me, is it a present or an experience?

DOUG

Kind of both...maybe leaning a little more to the experience side.

MELISSA

Really? Do I need to pack? Where are we going?

DOUG

For this experience, you just need to stand right there.

MELISSA

Right here?

DOUG

Right there. And close your eyes.

(MELISSA closes her eyes, shivering in anticipation. DOUG moves for the door.)

MELISSA

Oh my God...oh my God...how long do I have to wait?

DOUG

Not long. Just keep your eyes closed.

(DOUG opens the front door and in steps DROPPA THE CLOWN, in full clown attire, including a big red nose and clown shoes. They both tiptoe towards MELISSA, who is practically dancing in place she's so excited. DOUG positions DROPPA right in front of MELISSA.)

Are you ready?
DOUG

Yes!
MELISSA

Open your eyes!
DOUG

(MELISSA opens her eyes and DROPPPO spreads his arms wide.)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!
DROPPPO

(DROPPPO honks the horn stuffed into the waistband of his pants and dances a jig as he sings "Happy Birthday" to the tune of "The William Tell Overture.")

DROPPPO
Happy happy birthday!
Happy happy birthday!
Happy happy birthday!
Happy happy birthday!
Happy Happy Happy Happy Happy Happy Birthday!
Happy Happy Happy Happy Happy Happy Birthday!
Happy Happy Birthday!
Happy Happy Birthday!
Happy Happy Birthday!
Happy Happy Birthday!

(DROPPPO ends his song with a crescendo of honks on his horn, which, in a well-rehearsed routine, he drops, steps on, picks up, honks again, then stuffs back into his waistband as he assumes a triumphant pose. There is a moment of pure stillness until...MELISSA screams for all she is worth. She stumbles around the room, still screaming, bumping into things, before finally collapsing into the fetal position, covering her face, and whimpering. DOUG looks on like he expected this as DROPPPO stares in shock.)

DROPPPO
I don't think your wife likes clowns.

DOUG
No. Actually, she's terrified of clowns. Has been as long as I've known her. It's not that uncommon apparently. It's called coulrophobia, which means--

Fear of clowns.

DROPPO

Right.

DOUG

So, I'm not sure this was a such a good idea for a birthday present.

DROPPO

No, actually it's a great idea.

DOUG

How do you figure?

DROPPO

Well, how many pieces of jewelry can you get someone? And how many fancy restaurants can you go to? But this...to take someone's greatest fear and have them finally face it and overcome it, don't you think that's the best present you could ever give anyone? She can't go to the circus, can't go to carnivals, and she can't go to half the birthday parties for our nephews and nieces because there's going to be a clown there. It's an irrational fear that genuinely affects the quality of her life. So, what better present than curing her of that fear?

DOUG

Right.

DROPPO

Now, I did some research on phobias and apparently what the experts do to get people over their fears is try to get them more comfortable with the very thing that terrifies them. They call it immersion therapy...which is where you come in.

DOUG

Yeah, I get that.

DROPPO

So, what I'm going to do is, I'm going to leave you two alone for a little bit, and run up to the store to get some birthday candles. It'll give Melissa time to...assimilate, or whatever the word is.

DOUG

Acclimate?

DROPPO

Bingo! Let her acclimate to you being here and, you know, once she gets over the shock, just play it by ear. Okay? Great! I'll be back in a few.

DOUG

(DOUG exits at speed. DROPPO looks at the whimpering MELISSA. Long pause.)

DROPPO

I'm really sorry about this. Your husband didn't tell me you were scared of clowns.

(as MELISSA keeps whimpering)

Listen--

(DROPPO takes a step towards her and MELISSA writhes away from him, the volume of her whimpering increasing.)

DROPPO

Okay...maybe I'll just sit down.

(DROPPO sits on the sofa and looks around. He picks up the travel magazine MELISSA was reading.)

DROPPO

The Greek Islands, huh? Do you like to travel?...I've never been to Greece, or Europe even. I've been to Montreal though...that's kind of like Europe, so I've been told...

(he sighs, then a hopeful idea hits him)

Do you like magic tricks?

(MELISSA sits up and shakes her head violently, looking at DROPPO the way a rabbit might stare at a rattlesnake. DROPPO rubs his face in dismay.)

DROPPO

You know, I'm just a regular person in a costume, with some make-up on. I don't understand why people, and believe me, it's a lot of people these days, why they have such a problem with clowns. Just last week, I got hired for this birthday party, a kid's birthday party, and they told me explicitly that I couldn't come dressed as a clown. So, I go, you know, a gig's a gig, and I'm doing my thing, making balloon animals and whatnot, and I ask this one little girl why they wouldn't let me be a clown...that I'm a nice clown, a funny clown. And this girl says to me, "Because if you were a clown, I wouldn't be here right now." I mean, that hurts. It does. It's not like I just put on this outfit and call myself a clown. I went to Clown College...I did...studied the films of Charlie Chaplin and The Three Stooges. I can juggle, walk on stilts, I can ride a unicycle...I broke my left elbow twice learning how to walk in these clown shoes. And now, all of a sudden, I freak people out. Where did that come from? Somehow, we now live in a society where everyone's afraid of something all the time. Everyone has some kind of phobia, or allergy, or condition...if it's not on our phones or a TV screen, we're terrified. So, we do everything we can to avoid the real world and real people. Anyway, I'm sorry about this. I really am. But why people are so afraid of clowns...I just don't get it.

MELISSA

It was a parade...

(as DROPPPO looks up)

...a Thanksgiving Day Parade. That's when it started.

DROPPPO

Do you want to tell me about it?

MELISSA

I've never told anyone, ever...not even my husband.

DROPPPO

Well, it's up to you. Feel free to tell me if you want. I'm not here to judge or anything...I'm just some clown.

MELISSA

I was probably eight or nine years old and I went down to the parade with my whole family...my mom and dad, my two little brothers, and we got there early so we had a perfect spot, right on the curb. And the parade starts and it's just wonderful. It's a gorgeous autumn day, they've got floats and balloons and marching bands, and then finally, at the very end, here comes Santa Claus. He's on this amazing red and green, tinsel-covered float and he's getting closer and closer, and one of his elves comes by and gives me a candy cane, and I'm holding the candy cane as Santa passes right in front of us and, I can't believe it, but Santa turns and looks at me. Not at my mom or dad, not at my brothers, he's looking right at me, and he puts his finger to the side of his nose and winks. At me. And I know that he knows what a good girl I've been and that this is going to be the best Christmas ever and it's like I'm floating on this cloud of pure joy and I turned to my brother to tell him what just happened and when I do there's this clown...this huge clown face about six inches from mine, and the clown says, "Merry Christmas, little lady!"

(long beat)

And I wet myself. Right there in the street. And I couldn't stop. My brothers are laughing, other people are pointing, and my parents are looking at me like they don't even know who I am. It was the single most horrible, humiliating moment of my entire life.

DROPPPO

Wow...I don't know what to say.

MELISSA

And that's not the worst part. The worst part, and I didn't realize this until years later, the worst part is that when I turned and saw that clown...I had the most powerful orgasm of my entire life.

DROPPPO

Okay...I didn't see that one coming.

MELISSA

That's what it was. That's why I couldn't control myself. I just went numb...head to foot. And ever since then, I've had this problem with clowns...and to be honest, I've had some other issues as well because of that moment. Not that my husband hasn't been great. He has. He's very, very understanding, and our relationship is just about perfect in every other way, but...it's like I have this mental block when it comes to...

DROPPO

I get it. You don't have to say another word.

MELISSA

Sorry to unload on you like this.

DROPPO

No, that's what I'm here for. Well, at least you're talking to me...that's something.

MELISSA

I guess so.

DROPPO

And you're looking at me without screaming. I'll take that as a positive. You're actually doing pretty good.

MELISSA

Thank you.

DROPPO

Then how about we try something? Maybe your husband's right. Maybe just getting a little more comfortable, more acclimated, would be a good idea. So, how about if I get up, and I'll just stand in the center of the room. I won't make any sudden movements, and if you want to get any closer to me, then you can. And if not, that's perfectly fine.

MELISSA

Okay.

(DROPPO stands up and slowly moves to the center of the room. He stops. MELISSA eyes him up and down.)

DROPPO

How we doing?

MELISSA

My heart's kind of pounding.

DROPPO

You want me to sit down again?

MELISSA

No. No, I need to be able to deal with this. Like you said, you're just a regular person in a costume.

(she looks at his shoes)

Where do you buy clown shoes, anyway?

DROPPO

There's a company called Spears...Spears Speciality Shoes. They've been around thirty years or so. Good outfit. Quality products. But not cheap, believe me...this is their tri-color full-length, lollipop model. These set me back \$425 a pair.

(MELISSA edges closer.)

MELISSA

And are there specialty clothes stores for clowns too?

DROPPO

Oh, you can find plenty of stuff on-line, but it's all pretty cheap. I prefer to make my own costumes.

(MELISSA moves closer, and touches DROPPO's pant leg, looking at it.)

MELISSA

This is beautiful stitching.

DROPPO

Thank you. I take a lot of pride in it. Tailoring is kind of a dying art, you know...kind of like clowning, I guess.

(MELISSA stands up and touches the fabric of DROPPO's shirt.)

MELISSA

I love this color.

DROPPO

Do you? It's my favorite too. I mean, it has to be bright, that's part of the whole clown thing, but I still think the right colors are what really pull an outfit together.

MELISSA

Absolutely.

(MELISSA touches DROPPO's bike horn.)

MELISSA

Did you make the horn too?

DROPPO

No, it's just a regular horn...old-fashioned bike horn. Probably made in China.

(MELISSA honks the horn and they both jump, then laugh at their reaction.)

DROPPO

Whoa Nelly! Wasn't expecting that!

(MELISSA honks the horn repeatedly as they laugh harder and harder. MELISSA stops honking the horn and they both try and get their breath back, but the temperature between them keeps rising.)

MELISSA

This is the closest I've been to a clown since...and I don't feel frightened at all.

DROPPO

Good...that's good...really, really good...

MELISSA

What's your name?

DROPPO

Droppo. Droppo the Clown. It's kind of my schtick, you know, that I'm clumsy...I drop things...Droppo...

MELISSA

That's why you dropped your horn.

DROPPO

That's why I dropped my...dropped my horn.

MELISSA

Droppo?

DROPPO

Yes?

MELISSA

There's something I need to tell you...

DROPPO

Oh?

MELISSA

I...love my husband very, very much...and he's probably on his way back from the store right now.

DROPPO

Sure. That makes sense. When people go to the store...they usually come back...from the store...

MELISSA

Yes, they do.

DROPPO

Then maybe I should go.

MELISSA

I think so...but thank you. For...

(DROPPPO raises his hands to tell her she doesn't need to say another word. He pantomimes locking his lips with a key, then kicking the key away. MELISSA smiles, a smile DROPPPO returns before heading for the door.)

MELISSA

Droppo?

(as DROPPPO turns)

Can I ask you one favor?

(MELISSA points to DROPPPO, then her own nose, then to herself. DROPPPO smiles in understanding and removes his clown nose. He goes on one bended knee before MELISSA and offers her his nose. She takes it. DROPPPO puts both hands to his heart, a gesture she mimics. DROPPPO stands up and walks backwards towards the front door. He waves goodbye, a gesture MELISSA returns, then DROPPPO exits. MELISSA takes a deep breath as she looks at the nose from all sides. There is the sound of a car pulling up and a door slamming. MELISSA conceals the clown nose in her hand as DOUG comes in.)

DOUG

Hey, was that Droppo I just saw heading out?

(off MELISSA's nod)

How did it go?

(MELISSA takes DOUG's hand and leads him to the sofa. They sit down. MELISSA opens her other hand to reveal the clown nose. She offers it to DOUG, who takes it. He looks in her eyes, then puts the nose on. She smiles, a smile he mirrors...as the lights fade.)

END OF PLAY.