

# **THE ANY KEY**

## **Ten minute monologue for a male actor**

by Chris Welzenbach

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### **A TEN MINUTE MONOLOGUE FOR A MALE ACTOR**

[Man in his late 30's enters and sits on bar stool, pulls out a pack of tobacco and some rolling papers and rolls a cigarette.]

You know. There's this pause right after the light changes from red to green when traffic on all sides just sits there. Like no one wants to go first. That's when I'd crank it. Pop right through the intersection. When I could still use my legs. When my legs still worked. Before the fall.

I was a bicycle messenger for eight years. I was in my thirties when I started. Most of the guys I worked with were just out of high school. I did it because I'd tried a lot of other things and this was one of the few things I actually liked.

I fell on account of Boston. That's not fair. It wasn't really Boston's fault. I was drunk. I got home late.

Boston's basically a good guy but he's not too bright. He got booted from Scobie's for like three months. That's hard to do. You meet more marginal people at Scobie's than anywhere else in town. Every bum in the South Loop uses the men's room. After a bum uses the men's room you can't go near it for like an hour. Big Mike the bartender once told me when he was working at the rewire shop at the phone company there was this old guy named Barney. He said Barney used to start his day up on Milwaukee Avenue. Polish part of town. Bars open at eight in the morning and the old guys are sitting there doing beers and shots. The bad ones do the scarf trick. Their hands shake so much they can't hold a glass so they stretch a scarf around their neck and they tie one end to their wrist and they use the scarf like a pulley to haul their hand up to their mouth without shaking. That's where Barney would start out his day. Couple beers and some pickled eggs. After Barney used the men's room at the rewire shop Big Mike told me it was totally uninhabitable.

[Gets up from stool.]

Boston's a good bike messenger. He's fearless. You gotta be fearless if you wanna do something like that for a living. Once you start flinching it's over. Wells Street is the worst. Because of the el tracks and the iron pillars flanking the street. It's narrower than most streets in the Loop and if someone opens a car door you can try and duck back into traffic and get fucking crushed or you can dodge the other way right smack into one of those freaking iron pillars. There are no good options.

I never had health coverage. None of the messengers do. You go down, it's your dollar. You're not working and you're paying bills, which sucks. That's behind me now. I work as a dispatcher. When I was a messenger I used to hate the dispatchers. Now I'm the guy the other guys bitch about.

Right now I'm living in this apartment in Pilsen with two other guys. When I first saw the place it looked like a dorm room. Pizza boxes and beer cans all over. Horrible. I don't want a place just to crash in. I want a home. I told them my bedroom and the living room and the kitchen will be my responsibility. You're just responsible for your own room. Then I started picking things up. It took me awhile. It takes me awhile to do anything. I was in physical therapy for three months.

I've done a lot of things. I was in the Navy back when I was a kid. I was in for six years. They made a serious effort to get me to re-up but I just wanted out. I repaired sonar equipment which doesn't really translate a paying job in civilian life. I worked at a warehouse in Arkansas for awhile. I'm originally from Arkansas.

At the hospital I fell totally in love with this Chinese nurse at the hospital. She was so beautiful. Just amazing. When she was working the floor I would not take a shit. I couldn't move my legs or my arms so I had to be assisted to the commode and then some floorwalker had to wipe my ass. I did not want this beautiful Chinese nurse to wipe my ass. I didn't care how bad I had to go. She was not gonna wipe my ass.

[Sits back down.]

I am thirty-nine years old. Officially middle-aged. Maybe that's what this is all about. I don't know. Sometimes I talk just to reassure myself that someone might be out there listening.

I got out of rehab last month. I got the dispatcher job and found the apartment. I bought a potted plant. I decided to be ordinary. Wanted to complete the mending process. At first I was at the Rehab Institute but they told me they had no room for me because I had no insurance but there was this place up in Waukegan. For indigent patients.

I was at the place in Waukegan for three months. Seemed a lot longer than that. The place was divided in two. On one side you had guys like me who were there for physical rehab. On the other side was this lunatic asylum. In the middle was this big smokers court. I hadn't had a cigarette in weeks but at the rehab place having a cigarette was the only break in your day. The only time you could meet with the others and have a talk. I broke down and started smoking again.

Lots of bike messengers smoke cigarettes. They're stressed out all the time. Never know what you're gonna take home from day to day. Aren't enough deliveries to go round. Used to be you could make good money. Then came the internet. Half the stuff we used to haul between buildings can now be sent by email. Used to take home six hundred a week. Before the fall I was scraping by on two hundred. You can't live on two hundred a week in this society. You can't live without medical insurance either. They say I owe big. Hey. You can't get blood out of a rock.

There's lots of guys like me.

I knew my dad until I was five. Then he left us. Ditched us. Went away and didn't come back. It was tough on my mom. We scraped by. All my life I've been scraping by. I fantasize about what it must be like to be a trust child and never have to worry. I sometimes do deliveries to those ritzy places on the Gold Coast. Guards give you the eye when you come into the lobby. They're there not so much for security as to let you know you don't belong. That you're excluded.

All the office buildings downtown have guards. You have to sign in and out. Sometimes they give you a temporary stick-on badge. At Scobie's the men's room walls are coated with temporary stick-on badges. Sometimes the badges have made-up names like Hannibal or Spiderman. Most of the guards are black. Most of the messengers are white. A lot of the messengers are in bands. I think most of the guards are ex-military.

My days used to have a rhythm. Up in the morning, first time on my bike that day. Letting it glide down to the intersection. I'm not even thinking about work until I'm practically downtown. Then my walkie-talkie starts to buzz and the beat begins. It's tough in the winter. It's tough in the summer. It's tough when it rains. Some of the buildings downtown. I swear. They create their own weather systems.

Don't even get me started about boxes. You get a box first thing starting out you're gonna get boxes all day. I have never delivered just one box. Get a box to start out with it'll be nothing but boxes all freaking day.

I don't think you wanna think too much about what you're gonna do with your life. Most of it is beyond your control anyway. Most people think that things will always continue the way they've been going. Most people don't know any better.

I used to have a girlfriend. Katherine. We had terrific fights. Then we broke up. I knew it wouldn't last. Nothing good ever lasts. Look at any sidewalk. See the cracks. Not the expansion joints that were put there on purpose. Look for the cracks. That's what it is. Entropy. The most powerful force in nature.

[Gets up from stool.]

Things don't want to be organized. Things don't like plans. Things love chaos. All things love to make a mess. I mean. I like keeping my home neat. It's where I live. But it's an uphill battle. The guys I live with are animals. Monday morning there's beer cans all over the place. Beer cans in the freaking clothes hamper. On top of the Mickey Mouse clock in the kitchen. Honestly. You can't find the fucking trash can?

Entropy. That's the story of my life. Back in the day computer programmers told this joke about how they ought to invent an Any Key so that when some tech support guy is telling a customer to hit any key, they'll no longer be looking all around the keyboard for the fucking thing. That's what I need in my life. The Any Key. Hit that sucker and everything snaps back into focus.

I look around and more and more I see entropy winning against order. We're gonna kill ourselves with global warming so what do people do? Go out and buy the biggest fucking SUV they can get their hands on. People drive everywhere. They get fat. I've heard that living on a cul de sac adds ten pounds to your weight. You see them on TV when there's a fire or a murder out in the suburbs. Fat white people with pasty complexions who never leave their precious air conditioning. What happens when power gets scarce? What happens when food gets rationed? How are these people gonna survive?

I'm not one of those the end is nigh whack jobs walking around City Hall with a cardboard sign. I'm a reasonable person. But I'm not stupid. Most people in this country are real stupid.

Entropy. You see homeless people at every street corner. You see housing units for sale all over the place and no buyers. Makes tons of sense. Homes with no people and people with no homes.

I'm not a revolutionary. I realize there's a limit to what a single person can do. You can tell people look, the future is not gonna be as much fun as the past. This is plain to see for anyone willing to look. People don't wanna look. They wanna play video games and sudoku. They wanna go to Vegas. They wanna go to Cancun. Last thing they wanna do is think. Leave alone think rationally about the future.

When I was a messenger I'd pass them every day on the street. You can tell who someone is by the kind of car they drive. Traders like BMW's. Lawyers like Mercedes. Assholes like Hummers. I glide right past them. Don't need gasoline or a parking permit. The whole city is wide open. Driveways and alleys and parking lots. All kinds of places. In the old days you could ride out to the end of Navy Pier. Before they tore it down and put in a theme park.