

Sore Arms. Sore Eyes. Sore Feet.

By Jodie Hawkes & Pete Phillips

This is a text written for our *Save Me* book and was performed at the book launch at Arnolfini in Bristol. Jodie writes in red. Pete writes in yellow.

Firstly, ouch.

She looks so small in the distance and I haven't got binoculars.

Sore arms. Sore eyes. Sore feet.

I'm terrified I'm going to drop one of these flags into the water.

It is an epic task finding a baby sitter for eleven days, we have to make an excel spread sheet of who's picking up and dropping off.

'So where's the other fella...?'
'She's over there by the fountains, she's wearing red'.

The first time I practice on my platform I get vertigo, really not very nice vertigo. I'm worried someone will push me off, or I'll be making an R and misplace my foot. For a few hours we worry there is no way I can do this. We worry that this won't happen.

'Do you know semaphore then...?'
'Yes, I do'.
'Are you making it all up as you go...?'
'Yes, I am.'

I worry someone might push you over. I worry the wind might blow you into the water, and only I know you really aren't that great a swimmer.

'Are you two really together?'

'Yes.'

'Really together, in real life...?'

'Yes'.

The platforms we stand on have to be wheeled along the cobblestones. For a silent performance the set up is excruciatingly noisy.

'Can I leave a message? Will you send it? It's her wedding day/it's our anniversary/he won't get out of bed/I want her to marry me/I don't know where he is/I never got to say goodbye...'
'Yes, leave a message, I will send it for you.'

I feel like Clark Kent quick changing in the toilets of Watershed. When I emerge Chris de Burgh is on the harbourside singing LADY IN RED.

Every morning I say hello to the man selling the big issue on the bridge. 'How's it all going?' he says. 'Really well' I say.

Across all this water you make me smile. No one else knows what you just said to me, we share a moment and I feel closer to you than I ever have.

It's raining. Hard. More like hail stones. I'm still here waving my flags. Everyone else has run for cover. I'm in the middle of a message. I keep going. But the message doesn't get through – Jodie has been wrestling with a PVC poncho. She missed the whole thing.

At the fountains a group of primary school children are trying to

decipher your message, there's a drunk woman trying to get on my platform and signal for me, there's so much wind, everything is blowing away, there's a lady who has just found out she has cancer and needs me to send a message, there's a man from the site-seeing bus who want's to know what's going on, there's someone who's been with Pete who tells me I'm getting it all wrong, there's a guy asking if I've got a boyfriend, and a family who don't speak English leaving a message to someone, somewhere out there.

I want to tell you about this story that someone over here told me, it's quite long, and there are quite a few details that I can't edit out. It's going to take a while, but I think it's important. Really it's only a few sentences but when I have to spell out each letter with a wave of these flags it starts to drag. But stick with it. Stick with me. It's worth it. It's going somewhere.

My face is already sore from all this squinting.

I arrive on the bridge with my flags, ready to set up and tied to the railings is one yellow tag. Its plastic bag still has last night's raindrops speckled in its creases. It's been there all night. Someone took it away with them, sat down, thought about what to write and when they returned I had gone – so they tied their tag to the bridge, like a roadside memorial. I read it. I leave it there.

Karenzza, that's a really beautiful name.

And the boats go under the bridge and they wave. I wave back. And

the boats go under the bridge and they smile. I smile back. And the boats keep sailing in and out, and for 11 days we keep exchanging waves and smiles.

I swing my flags and knock someone really, really hard on the head.

And the tags keep coming. People write them, read them, take them away and bring them back.

My favourite type of audience member (if I'm allowed a favourite) is the older man who hangs out by the side for what seems like a good hour, who has a look on his face of pure reminiscence. He doesn't come over. He occasionally gives me a knowing nod and smile, as if to say 'I'm in on it'. There are lots of this man.

The first time we meet the saxophone player it's clear we're on his patch, his turf. He's not angry, it's clear he's done this before and the unpredictability of busking doesn't faze him. But still, I get the impression he'd prefer to be where I am and that I wasn't waving my flags on his bridge... A week later and I'm still here on this bridge and we meet the saxophone player again. And now it's ok, he takes up another pitch and looks over with a sense of acceptance – and after seven long days I start to belong here.

It's raining, no, hailing. I'm stuck in a poncho. I mean really stuck. My head is in the arm hole.

I hand the message you've just sent to Abbie (the Steward) to be written up on the chalkboard, and I'm composing my response and someone says, 'she's not finished,

she's waving her flags, she trying to say something.' And you are. And despite the 500m of water and boats and trees and swans and seagulls between us, I feel like I still can't get a word in edgeways. I ignore you and send my own, really long message back.

You spend ages in between messages fiddling with your flags, drinking water, reading the tags, thinking of what to say, speaking to people passing by. I'm so sick of waiting for you. I curse you under my breath.

I can't think of anything to say. And I know you're waiting. And I know you're getting angry, you're thinking 'come on Pete, what's taking so long, say something, say anything, what are you doing?' But the chalk pens are running out, I'm tired, the wind is too strong, I'm squinting, and I don't have anything to say.

When it is windy the flags feel twice as heavy, I struggle to move them, I feel the pain later. When the wind has gone, waving the flags feels less important, less skilled, less emotive, I wish for the wind and all it's arm ache.

Three men walk past. They're drunk at 11:30am. 'Go on, jump!' they say.

I see a man searching through the tags. I've seen him before, a day or two ago in the pouring rain. Now he's scanning the PREVIOUSLY ON SAVE ME board. So I ask him if he would like to write a message and he tells me that he already has and that I've already sent some of it. He shows me a rain splattered tag about someone called Karenzza and I say 'Yes what a

beautiful name'. And then he tells me about what happened. And I'm a little lost for words. I say 'I'm really sorry to hear that' and I feel silly for saying it. And I say 'can I tell Pete you're here?' And he says 'yes'. And he comes back again and again and again searching for his messages, searching for his tag, searching for his part in this story.

And now your B's are starting to droop, your L's are looking laboured, I can't distinguish your P's from your Q's and I have never been able to get my head round those last few letters of the alphabet which don't get used so often.

You send something terribly romantic and I have a brief moment where I see my boyfriend all the way over there, on a bridge, sending me a message with flags and it is really rather beautiful.

Eleven days feels like a really long time. It feels like it's never going to end. I just want it to end. I'm tired of all this flag waving, tired of all the tears and regret, I'm tired of everyone who did it in scouts or guides or cadets. I'm tired of all the yellow tags and I'm tired of standing here in this red jumper.

We arrive on day eleven to find Heart FM have a stand in the exact place I should be semaphoring. There's no way to move it. It's the Bristol 10K race and the harbourside is transformed into a silver foil wearing, tannoy speaking, water drinking place. There's a different sort of effort and duration here today. We have to wait a few hours before we can begin and I really don't want this to end.

The stewards are starting to flag,
they stop wearing their t-shirts and
handing out their programmes.
We're all starting to feel it.

Everyone around me is crying. I'm
not sure if it's all this effort, or being
so tired, or that I'll never be here
doing this again, or that I've been
listening and hearing all these
stories of loss and heartache. But
everything goes in slow motion,
blurry and as I spell out 'Enough
now, I'm tired. Goodbye arm ache.
Goodbye sore eyes' the tears roll
down my cheeks.

I want this to be over.

After the eleven days are over, we
wonder what we should do with all
these messages. We cut the yellow
tags off the platforms and feel very
guilty. We keep them in bags in the
kitchen. Other people's messages
for people out there tucked away in
our kitchen. We spend a few hours
reading them all. We wonder what
we should do. How we could get
the messages out there. We have
meetings with Ben around the
Kitchen table, over lunch and
decide we should put them here in
a book. We hope that's ok.