

Ledgeside

A play by Ben Connor

[Scene: The ledge of a building, high in the air. There is a window with the light on. Nighttime.]

[A shadowy figure, Edmund, inches his way down the ledge. He stops and looks down. He continues to move closer and closer to the window. He glances at it, then turns toward the abyss beneath. He toes the edge of the ledge, clasps his hands, and prepares to jump.]

[In the window, from her office, Emily sees him and panics. She runs to the window and opens it.]

Emily: Whoa! Hey! Hi!

Edmund: Oh, God. You scared me.

Emily: Sorry. [she takes a deep breath] Are you... the window washer?

[beat]

Edmund: Yep. I'm the window washer.

Emily: No, you're not.

Edmund: No. I'm not.

Emily: OK. You wanna- maybe- come inside for a minute?

Edmund: No, I don't think so. Thanks for the offer.

Emily: It's a very narrow ledge there.

Edmund: It sure is. Not something I'm particularly worried about.

Emily: You- um- you should really... I don't quite know how to approach this.

Edmund: It's OK; you're doing great.

Emily: I am?

Edmund: Last time I tried this, the guy was all "Don't let this stay on my conscience forever!" God. I was on the edge of a bridge and we started exploring *his* psyche. You're doing much better.

Emily: You've done this before?

Edmund: Oh, hell, yes. This is #3 or #4, depending on how you count.

Emily: How you count...?

Edmund: Well, I don't watch my cholesterol intake at all. Some would say that's just a slower way of doing this. [He motions to the ledge]

Emily: Can we... continue this conversation indoors?

Edmund: Nope. Valiant effort, though. They say you're not supposed to stop trying to talk me down.

Emily: Look, whoever you are, I can tell you're maybe not in a good place right now. Let me tell you, from the perspective of someone who might be a little more clear-headed, this is not the answer.

Edmund: *Please*. Are you reading off the back of a pamphlet? You don't know anything about me.

Emily: No one's life is worthless enough to-

Edmund: Jesus, lady. Amateur work. This isn't the strategy you want to be trying. Then I just come back with "Don't you believe in putting down sick dogs?" If it's a yes, then I say that I have the same load of pain that the dog has, just in emotional form.

Emily: And if it's a no?

Edmund: Then I ask you why you're assuming that life is better than the alternative. And we spiral into an existential discussion very quickly, and by the end you're joining me out here.

Emily: So... what strategy should I be trying?

Edmund: You could pull *It's a Wonderful Life* on me.

Emily: OK... Don't you have lots of people in your life who would miss you when you're gone?

Edmund: Nope.

Emily: [unsure of what to say] Oh.

Edmund: Boy, you fell right into that one, didn't you?

Emily: Ha.

Edmund: Amateur hour.

Emily: What about family? Don't you have a family?

Edmund: [*wincing*] Oh, and you started so strong. Short version: the ones who are dead shouldn't be, and the ones who are alive shouldn't be.

Emily: Why don't you just tell me exactly what's got you- out here. Then maybe I can be a little more helpful.

Edmund: A lot of things. Too many to name. Mostly the crushing realization- far overdue- that life isn't fair.

Emily: So you had some bad luck...

Edmund: Well... I find it's a little broader than that. Mostly, it's Darwinism. Some people succeed, and become Presidents and lawyers and movie stars and so on. And some become janitors and gas station clerks and ice cream vendors.

Emily: My father sold ice cream.

Edmund: Of course he did. I can't catch a break. The point is, though, that I realized quite suddenly one day that I hadn't a prayer of being *great*. I wasn't even much good at anything.

Emily: Wasn't?

Edmund: Oh, look at me. Already referring to myself in the past tense. Force of habit, I expect.

Emily: Have you really tried this four times?

Edmund: Three. The cholesterol thing was a joke.

Emily: Then you must've felt this way for a long time.

Edmund: I have. And I really don't see why I should let that feeling linger.

Emily: You have so many other options. I know you do. There's therapy. You can talk to people-

Edmund: You're so sweet to keep trying. Really, I appreciate it. Especially for your first time. As for therapy, I could never seem to shake the feeling that I was paying someone to care about me.

Emily: Lots of people do that! And some of them are Presidents, and movie stars, or whatever.

Edmund: Oh, I'm sure. And some of them are janitors, et cetera. I just happen to be that unfortunate mixture of unhappy and unsuccessful.

Emily: That's not a mixture.

Edmund: I'm sorry?

Emily: Unhappy is unsuccessful. Same thing. You fix one, you fix the other.

Edmund: How profound. You've halved my problems. Cue inspiring music and the rosy glow of dawn.

Emily: You are being very difficult, you know that?

Edmund: *[sad smile]* Yes. I do. If I were easier to get along with- to get close to- I wouldn't be here.

Emily: Maybe you're just afraid of... getting close to people.

Edmund: *[laughs]* Maybe you're full of it.

Emily: Just trying to help.

Edmund: I know you are. But I also know that Darwinism tends to apply to romance, as well. Some people end up with lifelong companions, and the remainder do not.

Emily: There's-

Edmund: No, there's not. There's not a special someone just waiting for me somewhere. Let's be cold and logical about this.

We don't each have a soulmate waiting for us out there. If we did, everyone would be happily betrothed by now. I say it's a matter of adapting to your surroundings. We all throw ourselves into the giant game of companionship and some of us emerge in pairs. And some don't.

Emily: Perhaps it's just a matter of patience.

Edmund: And perhaps it's a matter of luck. And perhaps it has to do with pheromones. Or taste in music. Any which way, the very real fact of the matter is that some people end up alone, and some people end up unhappy and unsuccessful, and some people end up... here. That's a fact. Every single argument against the futility of life is wiped away by the fact that there is factual evidence, a record, of people being born miserable, living miserably, and dying miserably.

Emily: *[to no one in particular]* "Gee, Emily, how'd you spend your Saturday evening?"

Edmund: Oh, I'm sorry; am I keeping you from something?

Emily: I'm joking! Calm down. Let's just keep it simple: you're depressed. No fancy language; you're depressed because you're unmarried and you're not a movie star.

Edmund: Thank you very much for trivializing my demons.

Emily: I'm saying these are solvable problems!

Edmund: *[glances downward]* I agree.

Emily: No! This is not the solution.

Edmund: This may not be *your* preferred solution. You might be more comfortable if I dusted myself off and turned that frown upside down, but it simply doesn't work like that.

Emily: *[deep breath]* Why don't you... put yourself in my shoes? What would you be saying if I were on the ledge and you were down here?

Edmund: *[chuckles]* Hmm. Outsourcing. Beginner move. I'd say, 'Is there anything I can do to make your life measurably better? Please take a moment and think carefully. I'm willing to help you.'

Emily: 'No, there isn't,' I say.

Edmund: 'Then I trust you to do what you know is best for you.'

Emily: *[outraged]* No! Wrong answer! You just let someone *[she motions to the ledge]* Ohhhh God...

Edmund: Honey, if you're going to faint over a hypothetical I suggest you close the window before the real thing.

Emily: *[still breathing heavily]* You're not really going to... Oh, hell. How'd you even get up there?

Edmund: It isn't as though this place bolts the hallway windows on the 44th floor. I like to think the architect and I share the same "live-and-let-live" philosophy.

Emily: You climbed all the way down here from the window in the hallway?

Edmund: Yeah. It's funny... You still feel a little dizzy and afraid to fall when-

Emily: Why didn't you just do it over there?

Edmund: I'm sorry?

Emily: You climbed out and shimmied all the way down this ledge to my window. Why didn't you just go straight out the window over there?

Edmund: Now you're offering me tips? Mixed messages here.

Emily: *[realization:]* You're such a fraud.

Edmund: Excuse me?

Emily: You wanted someone to see you. You wanted attention, and there was no one in the hallway.

Edmund: I didn't-

Emily: You're unbelievable, you know that? You do it for attention. You just go around standing on ledges for attention, and then you wait for a little sympathy from whomever you happen to plague with your rehearsed little guilt trip.

Edmund: Is it such a crime to want to be noticed?

Emily: It is definitely a crime to pretend you're gonna... [she gestures downward] Ohhhh...

Edmund: I apologize if I misled you.

[beat]

Emily: You're unbelievable.

Edmund: I know.

Emily: You weren't even considering it, were you?

Edmund: No.

Emily: Well, it seems we've reached the end of the pamphlet, then.

Edmund: That doesn't mean the conversation has to end, does it?

Emily: [stares] This is an office building, you know. My place of work. I don't just sit around here waiting to banter with the occasional ledge-side Hamlet.

Edmund: Fair enough.

Emily: Look, whoever you are-

Edmund: Edmund.

Emily: Emily. Whoever you are, I think you have plenty going for you. You seem nice. And smart. And you seem like you have dreams that haven't come true, and that's the only interesting kind of person.

Edmund: Thank you, Emily. I have plenty of those.

Emily: So keep going. I know it's stupid, but it's what I tell myself every day. Keep going.

Edmund: I will.

Emily: No, but do! Promise me that. Look me in the eyes and tell me you're not going to consider this again. [she gestures down]

There are plenty of office drones in this city who have enough work to do without becoming your 44th floor interventionist.

Edmund: I promise.

Emily: There are other ways to get attention in this world, you know. There are ways to stop needing it, too.

[they smile at each other]

So come on in, Edmund.

Edmund: I don't think there's a chance in hell I'll fit through your window. Have to crawl back around, I guess.

Emily: OK... *[she gives him another smile]* Promise me! No more ledges!

Edmund: No more ledges.

[Edmund begins to shimmy back from whence he came. Emily closes her window and disappears. When the window shuts, Edmund stops in his tracks and waits a moment. No noise. Edmund toes the very edge of the building and clasps his hands.]

Amateur.

[He jumps. Blackout.]