

"THE LEDGE"

By Rob Biesenbach

Characters

Mark - 30s/40s

Amy - 29 and 364/365ths

(On the outside ledge of a building, 15<sup>th</sup> floor. Amy stands with her back pressed to the building. Mark enters, as if on his own ledge on another side of the building. He carefully turns the corner.)

MARK  
OH MY GOD!!

AMY  
HOLY SHIT!!

MARK  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP HERE??

AMY  
WHERE DID YOU COME FROM??

MARK  
I'M NOT COMING DOWN!!

AMY  
I'M NOT COMING DOWN!!

(Slight pause)

MARK  
You're wha -

AMY  
Then you're not -

(She raises hand to cut him off. He defers.)

AMY  
So then, you're not here to "rescue" me?

MARK  
Rescue you? Heck no, I'm - wait. You mean, you're going to ...

(Gestures off ledge)

AMY  
Yes.

MARK  
Me, too.

AMY  
Oh. (Pause) Look, I don't mean to be rude, but this is MY ledge. I got here first. Could you go back to the other side of the building?

MARK  
But I don't want to jump over there. I want to go over the alley, so I don't -

MARK/AMY

Hurt anyone down below.

MARK

Right.

AMY

That's very thoughtful of you.

MARK

And they call this a selfish act.

(Pause)

Do you think this is high enough?

AMY

Fifteen stories. It should do the job.

MARK

But I've heard of people sometimes surviving a fall like this.

AMY

Technically, it's a jump, not a fall.

MARK

Right.

AMY

Presumably, by jumping we can control our trajectory. Head first, and all that?

MARK

Oh, yes, definitely head first.

AMY

To be really sure.

MARK

Yes, you wouldn't want to end up a vegetable.

AMY

Dependent on others.

MARK

Right.

(Pause)

So ... may I ask -

AMY

This is a nice ledge.

MARK

Huh? Oh, I suppose it's -

AMY

Really roomy. So many of your modern buildings don't have ledges.

MARK

Or even windows you could open if they did.

AMY

Or the ledges are way too small.

MARK

You really know your ledges!

AMY

This is a regular "I Love Lucy" ledge.

MARK

I loved that episode!

AMY

With Superman. The original one.

MARK

George Reeve.

AMY

Who ended up killing himself.

MARK

Right. With a gun.

AMY

Yes.

(Pause)

MARK

That's so messy. Can you imagine being the one to have to clean that up?

AMY

You could do it in the bathtub and leave the shower running. That way a lot of the mess just washes away.

MARK

You've really done some thinking on this.

AMY

Well, sure. You've got to have ... certainty, see? With a gun you really have to know what you're doing. Pills, too. Cutting takes way too long and hanging ... hanging is so ...

MARK

... iffy.

AMY

Yes. Besides, I have really low ceilings.

MARK

Aren't you scared?

AMY

You shouldn't think about that.

MARK

Well, I'm terrified. I've been up here for 20 minutes telling myself, "Go on, it's just like jumping out of an airplane!"

AMY

Oh, I've done that! Talk about scary. Even with a parachute!

MARK

Wow, you're braver than I am.

AMY

Not really.

MARK

So how come -

AMY

Yes, jumping is definitely the way to go. I remember in the days after the terrorist attacks, I couldn't stop looking at the photos of the jumpers. I was mesmerized. They looked so peaceful, so content.

MARK

Of course you couldn't really see their faces.

AMY

Right. (Pause) I read that a body falling from that height hits the ground with the force of a railroad freight car.

MARK

God, you're morbid!

AMY

Well ... yeah?

MARK

Oh, right. (Pause) Do you think that ... we have a ... responsibility?  
Like to them? To the people who don't have a choice?

AMY

(Considers briefly) No. I don't feel a responsibility to anyone.

MARK

Oh. I guess this is the ultimate selfish act then.

AMY

I can live with that.

(They share a weak laugh. Pause.)

MARK

So, can you tell me why you -

AMY

We should really get on with this.

MARK

But wait, I want to know -

AMY

It's just a matter of time before some busybody calls the cops ...

MARK

Come on -

AMY

There'll be fire trucks, crowds, a big ta-doo ...

MARK

PLEASE, TELL ME -

AMY

WHAT? WHAT?

MARK

I WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE DOING THIS!

AMY

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

MARK

IT MAKES A LOT OF DIFFERENCE! (Pause) I'm having second thoughts.

AMY

Oh, my God ... look, I'm not your counselor. If you want to chat with  
someone, go back inside.

MARK

Maybe I will. And maybe I'll take you in there with me.

(He grabs her arm)

AMY

LET GO OF ME!

MARK

NO, NOT 'TIL YOU TELL ME!

AMY

YOU FREAK!!

MARK

HERE WE GO.

(He starts taking her into window)

AMY

OKAY, OKAY, OKAY!!

(He stops, waits)

AMY

Have you heard of Huntington's disease?

MARK

I think so, but I don't really know what it is.

AMY

It's hereditary. If one of your parents had it, you've got a 50/50 chance of getting it. I didn't beat the odds. I resisted being tested for the longest time - I didn't want to know. But then, a few years ago, things ... starting happening. Symptoms. A twitching in my feet. That's how it starts. From there it's a downward spiral toward dementia ... total physical breakdown ... So the tests came up positive. And the kicker is, because it started early, they say it will advance quicker.

MARK

So it's -

AMY

Incurable. I saw what it did to my Mom. She spent the last years of her life spitting up baby food and screaming that the carpet was made of insects.

MARK

I'm sorry.

AMY

It was a long time ago. Anyway, that's not how I'm going out. My time, my place, my choice. While I still have a choice.

(Pause)

MARK

So ... why today?

AMY

Tomorrow's my birthday.

MARK

How old are you going to be?

AMY

I'm not going to be anything.

MARK

Oh. Right.

(He starts through window)

AMY

Wait.

(He stops)

You have to tell me your story. I told you mine.

(He climbs back out)

MARK

Oh ... see, my problems just seem ... insignificant compared to yours.

AMY

Nonsense. Our problems are our own. What is it?

MARK

I ... got a promotion today.

AMY

We're not so good with occasions, are we?

MARK

They made me Director of Sales for the Midwest Region.

AMY

And you don't want to be Director of Sales for the Midwest Region?

MARK

I'd rather be dead.

AMY

Well, you came to the right place. (Pause) Sorry. What do - *did* ... you want to be?

MARK

I don't know. Anything but this. Anything but ... ordinary.

AMY

"I fear that I am ordinary - just like everyone."

MARK

Smashing Pumpkins.

AMY

Oh, you know it. They're one of my favorites.

MARK

Me, too. (Pause) I don't know how I got to this place. Remember the James Spader character in "sex, lies, and videotape?" He had just the one key, you know? To his car.

AMY

Right, because, the more keys you have, the more obligations.

MARK

Yeah, see, I've got all these damned keys. Keys to my home and keys to my car and to my office and ... well, some of these keys I'm not even sure what they open anymore. Or close. (Pause) But, either way, I'm responsible, you know? I'm responsible. At the office, I'm the only manager who's not an asshole. I spend half my day keeping all the assholes away from my people.

AMY

Your people.

MARK

That's how it feels sometimes.

AMY

They're not your people.

MARK

I know that but ... the place is just so damned awful. It's going right to hell and the people are so great and they don't deserve this and for two years now I've been killing myself - well, you know what I mean - trying to hold things together. And ... I can't do it anymore.

AMY

So just leave.

MARK

I don't want to let them down.

AMY

Don't you think -

MARK

Yeah, but at least this way I don't have to look them in the eye. Kinda "chicken," huh?

AMY

Oh, anybody who says this is the easy way out hasn't stood on this ledge.

MARK

My life wasn't supposed to be like this. It was supposed to be different ... spectacular.

AMY

Life's not supposed to be like a movie, you know.

MARK

Oh, if my life were a movie the audience would have walked out a long time ago. Anyway, I think it's time to go join them in the lobby.

AMY

(She sings) Let's all go to the looooobby ...

MARK/AMY

(Singing together) To get ourselves a treat.

AMY

I always loved the movies.

MARK

Me, too. (Pause) But I hated sitting through the previews!

AMY

Me, too! Get on with the show, already!

MARK

Exactly! (Pause) It's funny - we have some things in common.

AMY

You mean besides the (she makes jumping or throat slashing gesture).

MARK

(Finally laughs) Yes, besides that.

AMY

Well, I have a track record of being drawn to unavailable men.

MARK

You know, if this were a movie, we'd climb down from here and make a life together.

AMY

What's left of it.

MARK

Right. An extraordinarily ordinary life. (Pause) What's your name?

AMY

Does it matter? (Pause) Amy.

MARK

Hi, Amy. Mark.

(They smile, hold hands.)

I'm ready.

AMY

Head first, right?

MARK

Right.

(They take a deep breath, lean forward. Blackout.)