

PEOPLE WILL TALK

by Scott Mullen

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SYNOPSIS: Two people meet on a ledge one evening, both pondering jumping; as they talk—and discuss who gets to go first—they learn about the other person, and come to decisions about their own lives.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Ledge of a tall building's roof.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male)

MARTHA (f)30s-40s. An amiable woman on her way to getting drunk. *(45 lines)*

OWEN (m).....20s-40s. Depressed and unconfident. *(42 lines)*

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play tends to work better the more it looks like a ledge—whether that means using the edge of the stage or not. Martha likely will have to drink half a bottle of something, but it doesn't need to really be wine.

SET

A building ledge.

PROPS

- bottle of wine
- flask

AT START: *MARTHA is seated on a ledge, where she takes a swig from a half-empty bottle of wine in her hand. OWEN comes along, and looks at her in shock.*

OWEN: Oh!

MARTHA: Hi.

OWEN: I didn't expect anyone to be out here.

MARTHA: Have you come out to jump?

OWEN: Why would you ask me that?

MARTHA: Well, we're on a building ledge at night, twelve stories up.

And it's really a very nice night for jumping.

OWEN: Don't try to talk me out of it.

MARTHA: I won't. But you need to wait.

OWEN: What?

MARTHA: I was here first. There's a line.

MARTHA drinks. OWEN looks at her.

OWEN: Seriously?

MARTHA: I'm not jumping into... whatever you leave down there. Ew.

What, are you in a rush?

OWEN: Maybe I'll go to the other side of the building.

MARTHA: Bad decision—there are bushes on all sides of this building. You could land in them and live, and how awkward would that be? No, this is the best spot (*Looking down.*) Sweet, sweet concrete.

OWEN: You are a very dark person.

MARTHA: I'll drink to that! (*She does.*) Look—as soon as I finish this bottle, I'm gone. In the meantime, sit. Enjoy the view one last time.

OWEN sits. MARTHA offers him the bottle.

OWEN: I have my own.

OWEN pulls out a flask.

MARTHA: Liquid courage.

OWEN: Yes.

MARTHA: Well, to us, then.

MARTHA toasts him with the bottle. Drinks. OWEN drinks too.

MARTHA: My name's Martha. I know, it's old fashioned. Family name.

People always joked that I'd wind up with a George. I don't suppose you're a—

OWEN: Owen.

MARTHA: Ah. Kind of crazy we both picked this ledge, this night, this time. Did you come up here to stop me?

OWEN: No.

MARTHA: I guess that wouldn't make sense. How would you know? I haven't been out here very long.

OWEN: The bottle's half empty.

MARTHA: I'm a gulper. Don't tell me to slow down—

OWEN: You didn't come up to stop me, then.

MARTHA: I was here first.

OWEN: That's true.

MARTHA: Did you tell anyone?

OWEN: No.

MARTHA: So—

OWEN: I see your point.

MARTHA: Makes sense we're both here, though. It's a good building.

Open late at night. It has an elevator, which is huge—I'm not walking up twelve flights of stairs, even for this. Twelve seemed like a good number. And then the window in the hallway, opens right onto this ledge. Fate. I guess we do have to consider the choreography, though.

OWEN: Choreography?

MARTHA: Well, when you have two jumpers, the first one landing tends to draw a crowd. As second one down, you don't want to land on anyone below, do you?

OWEN: No.

MARTHA: But if you jump immediately after I do, people might think we jumped together. Some sort of doomed romance. People will talk. Though I guess people will talk anyway. Wondering why we did it. Gossiping. We definitely should not hold hands on the way down. That would totally confuse people.

OWEN: I don't want to hold your hand.

MARTHA: Have you ever been in love?

OWEN is quiet.

MARTHA: Is that what this is?

OWEN: I don't want to talk about it.

MARTHA: I still have a few gulps to go. You might as well spill. Again, I promise I'm not going to try and talk you out of it. Life is a personal choice. But if you want to tell your tale, you're running out of time. I'll be gone soon. *(She drinks.)*

OWEN: I've never been a well-adjusted person. Ever. *(Beat.)* Turns out I'm bipolar. I take a lot of pills, just to get me through the day. And then I met her—and things were better. So much better. She's my soulmate. I felt good. And I thought if I came off some of my pills, it would be okay. Because she was the best pill. *(Beat.)* But it doesn't work like that. Off my meds.... It got bad. I spooked her. And she ended it. And I understand—it's a lot to take in. A lot to ask of anyone. What right do I have to be a burden on anyone? So here I am. It's easier, you know?

MARTHA: So much easier.

OWEN: You're really not going to talk me out of it?

MARTHA: Are you back on your medication now?

OWEN: I am.

MARTHA: Then you shouldn't be drinking.

OWEN: It's coffee. Reminds me of her.

MARTHA: So you're on your meds, your mind is your own—what am I going to say? It's up to you. I don't have any educated opinions to offer. I've never been in love like that. I wish I was in love like that. A love that makes me want to throw myself off a ledge when it goes wrong? That's amazing. What's her name?

OWEN: Jennifer.

MARTHA: Jennifer. All Jennifers are adorable. What's up with that?

OWEN: I don't know. She is though. Adorable.

MARTHA: To Jennifer.

OWEN: To Jennifer.

MARTHA drinks again. Shakes the bottle.

MARTHA: Still got a few gulps left.

OWEN: So what's your story?

MARTHA: Cancer.

OWEN: Oh.

MARTHA: I was having migraines. Bad ones. And I've never been a migraine girl. So I go to the doctor, they do an MRI. Brain tumor. Size of a golf ball.

OWEN: I'm sorry.

MARTHA: The doctor told me that it needed to be attacked with aggressive chemo and radiation, and that it was going to be awful, and that I had only a 5% chance of surviving. Or... I could do nothing, and be dead in three months. He said those were my two options. I decided that maybe I had a third option, one that I could control. One that would be quick, and painless. And so I came out on this ledge. Looking out over the city. And I told myself that the only thing that would stop me was a sign. A miracle.

OWEN: And then I came along.

MARTHA: You? No. You are not my miracle. I was standing here, ready to take the plunge, literally trying to decide whether to go headfirst or feet first.

OWEN: I think I'd need to go feet first.

MARTHA: That's what I decided too! And I was just about to jump, and then off in the distance, there was this huge burst of light. It staggered me. This... glow. It was magical. And then I realized what it was. The huge Christmas tree over in Ochman Square. They'd just lit it up. Blinking red and green. Star on the top... just like I'd seen when I was a little girl. It was beautiful. A miracle. And who am I to argue with miracles?

OWEN looks out.

OWEN: I don't see it.

MARTHA: What?

OWEN: The Christmas tree.

MARTHA: No.

OWEN: I don't understand.

MARTHA: This happened three years ago. Three years ago, I stood here, ready to jump, and I saw that light. And it gave me hope. And I got down off this ledge, and I got the chemo and the radiation, and it was horrible, the worst thing I've ever been through. But I got through it—I fought through it. And the tumor shrank. The tumor disappeared. Complete remission. Another miracle. So every year, on the anniversary of that day, I come out on this ledge, and I drink a bottle of wine, and I embrace life, one more time.

OWEN: Wow.

MARTHA: So I'm not going to talk you out of this. We all have to own our lives. But if you're looking for a sign, if you're looking for a miracle—maybe it's me. Because the moment you picked to come out on this ledge, was the moment I was here. Or—maybe I'm not your miracle. It's up to you.

MARTHA drains the bottle.

MARTHA: So now my bottle is empty, and I'm going to go. I'm going to very carefully get up, and climb in that window, take the elevator downstairs, walk down the street to the diner, and get a slice of the most amazing pecan pie in the universe. Maybe I'll have two slices. And I'm going to drink a big cup of coffee. Sober up. And then go back to my life.

OWEN looks at her.

OWEN: But you're not going to talk me out of it.

MARTHA: Nope. That's up to you. Help me up?

OWEN does. They look at each other. MARTHA turns to go.

OWEN: It's good pecan pie?

MARTHA turns back.

MARTHA: The best.

OWEN: Whipped cream?

MARTHA: Got to have whipped cream.

OWEN: I do like a good pecan pie.

They both look out at the city. And OWEN reacts to something.

MARTHA: And there's the tree. All lit up.

OWEN: It's beautiful.

MARTHA: It really is.

*MARTHA takes OWEN'S hand, and they carefully head away.
Blackout.*

THE END

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