

Ledges

Two men, LEFT and RIGHT,
stand on chairs, facing each other
awkwardly across the stage. They
keep looking down anxiously.

LEFT

Evening. This is awkward.

RIGHT

Um . . . Good evening. Yeah.

LEFT

Don't lie. Don't be formal. Jesus, look at where we are. It's not a good evening, obviously. If it was good, then we wouldn't be talking, or at least, not like this.

LEFT nods across the stage.

Still, small world, right?

RIGHT

Right. I mean, I get what you mean. I just, uh, I don't really come up here normally. I mean, I don't really like heights.

LEFT

So why pick this as the way to do it?

RIGHT

I don't know. I guess I've always been afraid of it—look, why are we talking about this? Why don't we just go ahead and do it if we're

going to? There's no point trying to explain to someone who won't even be around after tonight.

LEFT

Don't you want somebody to listen, though? Someone who knows, or might know a little bit, about how you feel?

RIGHT

What's the point? You'll be dead soon too.

LEFT

Actually, I haven't decided yet. This isn't the first time I've been up here.

RIGHT

What do you mean? You're standing on the ledge already! I only came up here because I was absolutely sure that—

LEFT

Yeah, yeah, yeah, calm down. You want to vent? You gotta listen to me first, I don't want to sit up here and listen to your whole problem just to have you slip off once you feel all at peace with the world.

RIGHT

I guess that makes sense. So, uh, what's your name?

LEFT

Let's not do names. I mean, if we decide we feel really great after this and want to keep living, then I don't want to know the name of the guy who almost killed himself.

RIGHT

I don't think I'm going back inside, to be honest. I'm Oscar.

LEFT sighs and pauses.

Jim.

LEFT

Nice to meet—

RIGHT

Cut it out with the formalities, we're about to jump off a roof, for Christ's sake.

LEFT

I'm sorry, I was just trying to be polite.

RIGHT

So how old are you anyway? You gotta be what? Mid-forties?

LEFT

Something like that. And you look thirty-something, I'd say.

RIGHT

It's the lack of sleep.

LEFT

Oh, sorry. It was just a guess. So you haven't been sleeping?

RIGHT

We're looking down three hundred feet into the uncertain eternity of a sidewalk and you ask me about my sleep schedule? God, of course I haven't been sleeping. How about you, sir, how's your goddamn sleep schedule?

LEFT

Hey, relax. I was just asking. You make it seem like you're the only person on the planet who knows how to have problems. I slept just fine last night, thank you.

RIGHT

LEFT

Unlikely. How the fuck did you do that? I mean, whatever's eating you up must have reared its ugly head before today, right?

RIGHT

No, I mean, it did. It's been a long time coming. It's just that you learn to put up with it and keep going. But after a certain point, it gets to be too much. Hey, you want a cigarette?

LEFT

I quit.

LEFT looks down.

RIGHT

We're—

LEFT

Toss them over.

RIGHT tosses them across.
LEFT steps down to pick them up, then lights his and throws them back. They both sit on the ledges and smoke.

LEFT

Shit.

RIGHT

It won't make much difference now, right? I mean, considering you do jump. If you don't, then this is just a way to maybe speed up the process at least.

LEFT chuckles sadly.

LEFT

It's not that. It's what it means; I don't want to let something kill me. If I'm going to kill myself, I want to decide when and how it happens. Smoking always made me feel like I was putting my life up for a gamble.

RIGHT

Oh. That's pretty deep for a kid your age.

LEFT

Whatever. Not a kid anymore though. The last time I smoked a cigarette was the first time I stood on this roof actually. That was probably more than a year ago.

RIGHT

So why start again now?

LEFT

As opposed to dropping from a ledge? Yeah, like you said, sometimes it gets to be too much.

RIGHT

What happened?

LEFT

I came up here with my girlfriend. Tonight. She told me it was over, just randomly, like it was nothing. We were fine like five minutes before. I asked her what happened, and she said she just couldn't deal with me. She walked downstairs, and then I got up on the ledge and saw you.

RIGHT

I see.

LEFT

She was the one who had asked me to stop smoking last year. I came up here, nerves shot from a fight we just had, and got one out. But

you do things for people. So I threw them instead. (Beat.) Didn't matter though.

RIGHT

That's rough.

LEFT

I normally come up here sometimes to sit, I used to smoke, of course. Then I stopped and I'd just sit, think about what would happen if I did jump. I'd stand on the edge, get the adrenaline pumping, and think "If I'm dead, I couldn't get a rush like this ever again." So I'd step back down. You act like this is your first time up here; don't you ever think about it day-to-day?

RIGHT

Yeah, but I don't have time to go stand on rooftops. I think about it sometimes. Especially when I'm driving. Like, what if I just let go of the wheel?

LEFT

Really? You'd be okay with that?

RIGHT

I assumed you'd know what I meant. It's like, you just let it happen. You don't have to do anything. There's no jump. No moment of sureness, no final decision. It's easy.

LEFT

You don't seem sure of that.

RIGHT

I'm not, but I'm not sure of much. I also don't know if I can jump off a roof. I at least know I can do nothing.

LEFT

What do you mean?

RIGHT

I don't have the best home life.

LEFT

What do you mean? You and all your friends, if you've got any, you're all set, you got stability. Maybe not right now, just bear with me. I mean, most guys your age have got it all set up for them. They've got a house, a family, a steady job, friends to cover them if they screw up and need help. I'd give anything to be there.

RIGHT

No, you don't want to be over here. It's horrible. I used to live in that building you're on, and I'd give anything to go back, be in your shoes. Stand where you're standing. I've screwed up too much. Yes, you can screw up by doing nothing, and it's the easiest thing in the world.

LEFT

You mean with your family?

RIGHT

(Pause.) Yeah. With my wife, my two kids.

LEFT

Right. (Looks away.)

RIGHT

Wife's a bitch though.

LEFT

Oh.

RIGHT

I'm sure you've been around the block with girls your age. Nobody wants to stay together forever anymore. But you have kids, so you make do. You put up with it. Sure, you get your soul sapped sometimes, but those two girls are more than worth it. Or so they tell me.

LEFT

How old are they?

RIGHT

Twelve and seventeen. Eighteen, I mean. But it doesn't matter. They don't like me, and I don't have the time or the patience. Nothing fucking matters. They'd be happier without me.

LEFT

Shit. I'm sorry, man.

RIGHT

It's fine. They like her better anyway. She's good to them. She's a good mother. They'll be okay.

LEFT

(Pause.) Hey, I thought about what you said about the driving, and having an accident. It's not deliberate enough. It's just like the cigarettes.

RIGHT

Maybe. When you've been around long enough, and all that young-and-spryness starts to wear off, you don't want that kind of control. You want excitement and uncertainty. Sometimes I think, if I could just get a concussion, not die, maybe that would sort of jump-start everything back to life.

LEFT

Right.

RIGHT

Yeah. Or like, if I could lose the memories from the past ten years, maybe my wife would fall in love with me again, my kids would be interested again. I'm sorry. (Pause.) God, I wish I could go back to those days.

LEFT

Why? So you can be unsure of everything? At least you're certain of a few things over there. Your home is in shambles, and you've about gone off the deep end. You don't want to be back on this side. This side has crazy bipolar girlfriends and broken hearts and unsure depression that won't let you make up your mind and go full suicidal.

RIGHT

But you're up here, so how can you not be sure?

RIGHT stands up on the ledge
again and looks down thoughtfully.

LEFT

Standing here is nothing. Standing in a dangerous spot is the same as being in a car that's moving fast enough to tear you to pieces in the right accident. It's what you choose to do next that controls your fate. That's why your idea of letting go is bullshit. You can't just let something happen. That's a conscious decision.

RIGHT

And that's why I can't do it. Why can't you do it?

LEFT stands and looks down.
RIGHT and LEFT slow their
speech.

LEFT

I'm just not sure I want to go yet.

RIGHT

I know. It's big. But, what else is there?

LEFT

Not a lot. Nothing.

RIGHT and LEFT continue to
stare down until curtain.

RIGHT

It felt good to talk.

LEFT

Yeah, it did. You all peaced-up and right-with-the-world now?

RIGHT

Not at all. (Pause.) Are you going to do it?

LEFT

Are you?

Blackout.