

Incident on the Golden Gate Bridge

by

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Setting

The Golden Gate Bridge. 220 feet above San Francisco Bay.

Time

Now and then.

Cast

CARY - Man in his 20s-30s.

NIKO - Man in his 20s-40s.

JESSIE - Woman in her 20s-40s.

(Lights up on CARY, standing on a ledge, holding onto a pole or support of some kind, and looking downward. NIKO enters, tapping at his phone. He walks past CARY, then double-takes in alarm and stops.)

NIKO

Hey...whoa! What's going on? Everything okay?

CARY

I'm fine.

NIKO

You sure about that?

CARY

I'm fine. Really.

NIKO

You're standing on a ledge two hundred feet above the water.

CARY

Yeah.

NIKO

Any particular reason?

CARY

Just thinking about things.

NIKO

Okay...what kind of things?

CARY

Everything.

NIKO

Sure. I get you. But maybe you should do that in a coffee shop or something.

CARY

I'm good.

NIKO

See, the thing is, with you hanging out there like that over the water, it kind of looks like you're maybe thinking of jumping.

CARY

I just need some perspective. And if I was in a coffee shop there would be all kinds of distractions. The noise, other people...but here, it's just me and the water. It kind of helps clarify things.

(JESSIE enters, on her phone. She glances at CARY and jolts.)

JESSIE

OH MY GOD!!! Don't do it!

(JESSIE moves towards CARY and he quickly adjusts his position, standing on one leg.)

NIKO

(to JESSIE)

Stop! Don't move! I'm talking to the man here!

JESSIE

He's going to jump! He's going to kill himself!

NIKO

He's thinking about things, okay? That's all!

JESSIE

(whispering intensely to NIKO)

Are you insane? Look at him! He's going to jump! People do that here! Thirty people killed themselves jumping off this bridge last year!

NIKO

(right in JESSIE's face)

I'm talking to him. We're talking, not jumping. Got it?

JESSIE

You're talking.

NIKO

That's right.

JESSIE

Talking is good.

NIKO

Yes, it is.

(turning to CARY)

Now listen...I'm not sure I caught your name.

CARY

Cary.

NIKO

Cary. Great. I'm Niko. And this is...?

(NIKO turns to JESSIE.)

JESSIE

Jessie! My name's Jessie.

NIKO

All right then. So Cary, what exactly is on your mind? What are you trying to get perspective on?

CARY
My life, I suppose.

NIKO
Yeah?

CARY
It's not...not where I thought it would be.

NIKO
Hey, that happens. I mean, when you're growing up, you're going to be all kinds of things, really cool things, but then adulthood hits and--

JESSIE
--you are totally fucked right up the ass.
(off NIKO's look)
Sorry. It just slipped out.

CARY
No, you're right. That's what happens. That's exactly what happens. I mean, I tried to be sensible about things. I did. And it's not like I had crazy dreams or anything. I listened to my high school counselor and took all these computer coding classes because, you know, that's where the jobs are, right?

NIKO
Sure. It's all computers these days.

CARY
And I got a job too. A good one. At Neptune Microsystems.

JESSIE
Oh, they have the coolest building downtown! The one that looks like a wave?

CARY
That's it.

NIKO
Well, that sounds pretty sweet. You still work there?

CARY
Kind of.

NIKO
Kind of what?

CARY
As it turned out, they decided to cut costs by outsourcing a lot of their coding work, so my position got eliminated. But they offered me another job in the company.

JESSIE

I've heard they're a great outfit! They even have free M&Ms in the break room!

CARY

Yeah. Cashews and espresso too. They have the Holy Trinity of Software Development pretty well covered: sugar, salt, and caffeine. I'm telling you, some of those people, you slap a two-liter of Mountain Dew on their desk and they'll work for six hours straight without even looking up.

NIKO

Uh-huh. So, if you're not coding anymore, what kind of job are you doing now?

(CARY lets out a stifled sob and adjusts his feet, looking down at the water.)

NIKO

No!
Don't do that!
Do not look down!

JESSIE

No, no, no!
Come back this way!
Look at us! Look at us!

(CARY turns his head to NIKO and JESSIE.)

NIKO

There we are! That's it...

JESSIE

That is totally it. Not jumping is totally it...

CARY

I can't...I'm too ashamed to tell you what I do. And how pathetic is that? No one knows what I do. Not my friends, not my family. No one.

JESSIE

But you're still at Neptune Microsystems?
(off CARY's nod)
So it's still computers?

CARY

(shaking his head)
No. It's...

NIKO

You can tell us. I mean, we're not your friends or family. We're complete strangers, so we're not going to be judging, all right? So, what do you do there?

CARY

The guy...CEO, owner, whatever. The guy who started the company. He's pretty well off.

JESSIE

Well, duh! He's like a multi-billionaire! He owns islands and shit.

CARY

Yeah. So, he's got this big-ass yacht. And on the deck he has a full-size basketball court so he can play basketball with his buddies. And...it's a yacht. A boat. On the ocean. So, once in a while a basketball will go over the side and into the water.

NIKO

Yeah?

CARY

That's my job.

JESSIE

What?

CARY

I follow behind the yacht in a powerboat...picking up basketballs that fall into the water. That, apparently, is what I was put on this Earth to do.

NIKO

Okay...wow. That does sound a little...I'm starting to get the whole why you need perspective thing. But hey, at least they can't outsource that job, right?

CARY

I guess. What do you do, Niko?

NIKO

Me? Oh...I'm a musician.

CARY

Good for you. Now see, that's a great profession. That's what I wish I had. Something creative, something--

NIKO

No, you don't.

CARY

What do you mean?

NIKO

It's not what you think, all right? I mean, I tell people that I'm a session player, that I get hired for various albums and concerts, but...

CARY

Yeah?

NIKO

Have you guys ever watched the cooking shows they have on TV?

CARY

Sometimes.

JESSIE

I love those shows! Especially when I'm just eating some pasta out of a can or something. It makes the food taste better.

NIKO

Right, well, a lot of those shows have music in the background, like when the host is about to eat some ribs at a BBQ shack or an elephant ear at a carnival. That's me. I'm the one playing the guitar or banjo or whatever. Fifteen years of lessons and practicing four hours every day and that's me. Because people don't want to listen to live music anymore. They don't want to hear real musicians who can actually play an instrument. They want some kind of synthesized, auto-tuned bullshit they can rip off the internet for free.

CARY

I don't think I ever noticed the music on those shows.

(NIKO stifles a sob, then climbs up next to CARY.)

CARY

Hey, hey, hey!

NIKO

(looking down)

Whoa daddy! Oh my God, that is a long way down. I think that's enough perspective for me.

(Gingerly, NIKO gets off the ledge.)

JESSIE

What are you doing?

NIKO

Just...I'm going to need a second.

JESSIE

You could have saved him! You were up there!

NIKO

Yeah? Then you get up there with him.

(beat)

And what do you do, anyway?

(Long beat as CARY and NIKO look at her.)

JESSIE

I'm...a dog walker. Which I shouldn't be, because I have a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's in Social Work, but that's what I do. I walk other people's dogs and pick up their poop. And it's a lot of poop, believe me. The dogs save it up for their walks, you know.

NIKO

Sure.

CARY

That makes sense.

NIKO

So, the Social Work thing...you couldn't get a job?

JESSIE

Are you kidding me? No, it's a booming field...everyone's lives are so fucked up these days, right? Well, except for the people with yachts, I guess.

CARY

Then why...?

JESSIE

It's too sad. You wouldn't believe it. There's so much anger in people, so much hopelessness. I thought I could handle it...distance myself...but you see what happens to people when they lose a job...when they can't afford their medical bills...when a kid gets hooked on opiates...plus, I really like dogs. And hey, nobody's outsourcing picking up dog poop. That's some serious job security right there.

CARY

Listen, I appreciate you guys telling me about your lives, but you don't need to be here.

JESSIE

I'm not leaving. And if you jump, I swear to God...you can't.

NIKO

You really can't. Seriously. Come on down off of there.

CARY

Have you heard anything I said? I fish basketballs out of the Pacific Ocean with a net behind a five-hundred-foot yacht! That's how I make a living! There is something seriously fucked up about that!

NIKO

Absolutely there is. That is completely fucked. But it's not you.

JESSIE

Exactly! You are not the fucked up part in that equation.

NIKO

It's the times...the whole fucked up system. Everything is being outsourced and automated to make more money, but only for the people at the top. Your company? Neptune Microsystems with the multi-billionaire owner? I read the other day I pay more taxes than they do. It's just bullshit.

JESSIE

That's exactly what it is! Plus, we have a government basically run on bribes, which the lying sonofabitches call "lobbying," and the media just want to keep everyone pissed off at each another to boost their ratings. Do you know what we're living in? A society run by sociopaths! Our problem? I'll tell you what our problem is. We're not one of them! So we look around at the world and it just seems insane!

(beat as CARY and NIKO stare at her)

Dog-walking gives you a lot of time to think about things.

(NIKO and JESSIE move closer to CARY, holding their hands out.)

NIKO

So, come on now...

JESSIE

Just take our hands...

CARY

Why are you doing this? Why can't you just leave me alone?

JESSIE

Because you're not.

(JESSIE and NIKO keep holding their hands out, but take each other's free hand.)

NIKO

Yeah. What she said. That perspective you're looking for? It's not down there in the water. It's right here looking back at you.

JESSIE

Absolutely. What he said.

CARY

But--

NIKO

Listen, I don't know you, all right? I pretty much almost walked right past you because I had my face buried in my phone.

JESSIE

Same here.

NIKO

But I do know this. If you jump it will break my fucking heart.

JESSIE

Seriously.

CARY

Why?

NIKO

That's a good question. Because honestly, if I wasn't here right now and I read about you jumping on my news feed tomorrow, I wouldn't think twice about it. I'd take another sip of coffee and check out the weather or the latest dumb-ass thing somebody said on Twitter.

JESSIE

But this is different. You're not just a name on the news. You're right here. Right now. Same as us.

NIKO

And let me ask you something. If our positions were reversed, if I got sick and tired of laying down blues riffs to back up some celebrity chef shoving brisket down his throat, or if Jessie got sick and tired of picking up other people's dog shit, would you want to see us jump?

CARY

No, of course not. That would be horrible. You guys seem really nice.

NIKO

Yeah...and so do you. So, come on.

JESSIE

Please...please.

(Long beat, then CARY takes each of their hands in his and comes down off the ledge. They all continue to hold hands as they take a moment.)

CARY

They say it's the moment you jump that you wish you hadn't.

JESSIE

I've heard that.

CARY

It's not...I'm not crazy. I'm just trying to understand things.

NIKO

Aren't we all...

(Lights fade with the trio not letting go of one another.)

THE END.