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Dramatic Publishing

LEDGE, LEDGER AND THE LEGEND

By
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LEDGE, LEDGER AND THE LEGEND

CHARACTERS:

PETE

J.M.

P.J.

PLACE: Outside ledge of a tall building.

TIME: The present.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Ledge (corner and two sides), window (practical).

PETE: Wallet containing currency, wristwatch.

J.M.: Business card, chewing gum, receipt book and pen.

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LEDGE, LEDGER AND THE LEGEND

SETTING: *The outside ledge of a rather old tall building. The ledge makes a corner about halfway across stage and disappears from view. PETE, a young man about twenty-five years old, is seen edging his way along the ledge. He is obviously distraught and this is his final desperate move.*

PETE. It's over, over. (*Almost losing balance.*) Ahhh! (*He sways momentarily and then clings desperately to the wall.*) OVER!

(*J.M. crawls through a window and onto the ledge.*)

J.M. Hey, buddy, hold on. Wait a minute.

PETE (*hysterically*). Don't come near me. I'll jump. I'm warning you.

J.M. (*stopping short*). Okay. Okay, don't get uptight. I'll stay right here. What's your name?

PETE. What do you care what my name is? Nobody cares. Nobody listens. Nobody ever listens. (*Pause.*) My... name is Peter Ruther—

J.M. (*interrupting*). You gonna jump from there?

PETE. Huh?

J.M. You don't want to jump from there.

PETE. Don't try to talk me out of it. It's no use. I've made up my mind. My life isn't worth living. It's over...over.

J.M. You sure you want to jump from *there*?

PETE. Yeah, sure, I'm sure. Everything is...

J.M. Okay, if you want to blow it.

PETE. Huh? Blow it?

J.M. What did you say your name was?

PETE. Pe—

J.M. You don't want to jump from *there*.

PETE. And why not?

J.M. Unless you move over about five feet, all you'll do is hit that fire escape down there. Break a few legs but nothing permanent.

PETE. Huh? (*Looking down.*) Oh, boy! Okay. I'll...I'll jump far out...give it a high arc.

J.M. You trying for the Olympics or suicide? Take my advice, freely given: Move toward the corner five more feet at least.

PETE. You think so? What do you know?

J.M. Look, I'm a professional at these things. It's my business. See, here's my card. (*Reaches toward PETE with card.*)

PETE. Ahah! Thought you'd trick me, didn't you? (*Mocking J.M.*) "Here's my card." I'm not that dumb. I'm gonna jump. Nobody's gonna stop me.

J.M. Who wants to stop you? Go ahead, jump. Make a fool of yourself. God, you amateurs are all alike: Touchy, touchy, touchy. First thing that goes wrong...

PETE (*screaming*). First thing?

J.M. All right, something goes wrong and bingo, you jump out of the first window available. Never consider the effects or consequences, not to mention the mess.

PETE. The mess?

J.M. Certainly the mess. Boy, you're dumb. You didn't expect to just go— (*Imitates soft whistling sound falling until:*) —“tinko.” You're gonna go— (*Imitates falling plane ending with:*) —“SPLAT!”

PETE. Well, what's the difference? What do I care?

J.M. You care, believe me, you care. Somewhere in that feeble mind, you care. (*Pause.*) Look, here's my card.

PETE (*drawing back*). You won't try to grab me?

J.M. Look, I'll just stick it on the wall here. (*Takes gum from mouth and uses it for adhesive.*) Trust me. I know what's best. (*J.M. backs away and PETE slides over toward card.*) Take you, for instance. You've probably been a failure all your life and now you're gonna screw up your suicide, too. Can't you amateurs do anything right? (*PETE is trying to turn around on the ledge so he can read the card still attached to the wall, loses balance and almost falls, regains control and flattens against wall, breathing heavily.*) Will you be careful? (*PETE still hasn't read card.*) Pull it off the wall. (*PETE fumbles around trying to find card and, locating it, tries to pull it off. Finally he succeeds and clutches it to his heart—a triumphant achievement.*)

PETE (*crooking neck, trying to read card held at chest level*). “J.M. Millirbout, SUICIDE TO GO. Money-back guarantee.”

J.M. Yep.

PETE. Is this some sort of gag?

J.M. No. (*With pride.*) I'm a specialist. Look, Joe...

PETE. Peter!

J.M. Peter. Look, Pete, you don't want to make a mess of this, the most climactic moment of your life, do you?

PETE. Why should I care? A— (*Imitating falling plane sound.*) —“splat” is a “splat.”

J.M. Oh, no, you’re dead wrong. There are “splats” and there are...“SPLATS.” It’s kinda like a last will or testament. You want to make people notice, say what a good job you did, say “Now that was a SPLAT,” don’t you? You want people to remember it, don’t you?

PETE. Why should I care whether people remember it or not? Why should I want people to notice?

J.M. Then what the devil are you doing out on this ledge?

PETE. I want to commit suicide. I want peace and...

J.M. And you don’t care whether anybody notices or not?

PETE. Well, no, I...

J.M. Why didn’t you just cram pills?

PETE. Well, I...

J.M. There’s poison.

PETE. I didn’t...

J.M. Step in front of a car?

PETE. Look, I...

J.M. Why? Why? Why this ledge? Because you wanted everybody to know. You wanted everybody to notice. I know your kind— (*Turning head in disgust.*) Amateur.

PETE. Wait, I wouldn’t...

J.M. You wanted everyone to see and feel sorry for you. You wanted them to know just what they’d done to you.

PETE. That’s not true.

J.M. You’re a show-off. I’ll bet you even left a note.

PETE. Well... No, no, I didn’t.

J.M. Come on, where is it?

PETE. I didn’t...

J.M. Come on. In your apartment? Your car? You mailed it! To your mother? Girlfriend? Wife? Boss?

PETE. I didn't mail it.

J.M. Ahah, you wrote one. Where is it?

PETE (*dejected*). In my wallet.

J.M. See, what did I tell you. (*Disdainfully.*) Amateur. I know your type. Amateur. You can't fool old J.M.... Amateur... Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

PETE (*completely broken*). I'm sorry. (*Sobbing.*) I did wrong.

J.M. Wrong? You stupid amateur, for once you did right.

PETE (*brightening*). I did?

J.M. Sure! It's your life. If you want to make a point, make it.

PETE. Yeah!

J.M. Show the world.

PETE (*even brighter*). Yeah!

J.M. Let 'em know.

PETE (*exuberantly*). Yeah!

J.M. Go out with a bang, not with a thud.

PETE (*cheering*). Yeah, yeah, yeah.

J.M. Throw yourself off a building.

PETE. Yea... (*Looking down and almost gasping.*) ...h!

J.M. Splatter yourself all over kingdom come. (*No answer from PETE.*) Spread out down there. (*PETE is getting nauseated.*) Blend into the environment. (*Noticing PETE.*) Hey, what's wrong? Hey, Joe?

PETE. Peter.

J.M. Hey, Pete. You look white as a ghost.

PETE. Feeling kinda faint.

J.M. If you were any place else, I'd tell you to put your head between your legs but here that might not be too wise. What happened?

PETE. I just realized something very important. I'm afraid of heights.

J.M. Pete, baby, get hold of yourself. You've made it this far. You've got something to say. Now's the time to say it. (*PETE doesn't answer.*) Well, I'll be. If that doesn't just take the cake. Get me all the way up here and then chicken out. You're a real bust. (*Derisively.*) Big man. Gonna tell the world. You wouldn't even make last page at the rate you're going.

PETE. I'm sorry.

J.M. You certainly are! Oh, well, it probably wouldn't have worked anyway. You've already made a botch of it. Don't know why I even try with you amateurs. I just wanted to be helpful. Gimme my card back and I'll go.

PETE. I said I was sorry.

J.M. (*sarcastically*). Better get down off that ledge, little boy, you could hurt yourself.

PETE. I won't get down. I want to kill myself.

J.M. Well, at the rate you're going, you could slip and fall. Gimme my card back.

PETE. My card, my card, my card. Is that all you care about?

J.M. Those cards cost five bucks a gross. I'm not in this business for my health. Since you're not going to listen to the advice of experience, gimme back my card.

PETE. See! Nobody cares, nobody gives a...

J.M. You're one hundred percent right, buster. I'm a busy man and I haven't got all day. If you don't need me, there are millions of others who do.

PETE (*humbly*). Please don't go. I need you.

J.M. It'll cost you.

PETE. Doesn't everything?

J.M. Mine is a business. I supply a needed service both to the individual and to the greater community at large. It's the way I feed my family. Anyway, my rates are no higher than any other business.

PETE. How much?

J.M. First I'd like to point out that money's not going to do you any good where you're going.

PETE. How much?

J.M. (*eyeing him carefully*). Twenty-five bucks, and that's a deal.

PETE. I only have twenty.

J.M. Okay, since it's you and I think you're an all right guy, even though you're an amateur, I'll make an exception. (*Confidentially.*) But don't spread it around or I'll go broke.

PETE. Spread it around; not likely.

J.M. Okay, hand me the money.

PETE. This isn't a trick, is it? You're not going to try to grab me, are you?

J.M. Only the money. (*PETE takes out wallet and slides it to J.M.*) Nice wallet. (*J.M. pockets the money and then begins writing out a receipt.*)

PETE. What you doing now?

J.M. You want a receipt, don't you? Look, I run a legit business. I want you to feel protected. There. (*Puts receipt in wallet and slides it back to PETE.*)

PETE. Thanks.

J.M. Look, how about putting that wallet in your top coat pocket. It's awfully good leather. Hate to see it get ruined. You understand, don't you?

PETE. Yeah, sure. (*Puts wallet in upper pocket.*)

J.M. Now let's get down to business. May I join you?

PETE. What do you mean?

J.M. I need to get closer. It strains my voice, you know. (*Moves closer.*) There. (*Clears throat.*) No, first off I should like to explain that I'm going to have to condense the lessons since you've already skipped steps 1 and 2. I only wish you had come to me for counseling sooner. Well, you're here now and so we'll start with lesson 3: Environment.

PETE. Environment?

J.M. Yeah, and you're lucky there. Wind's a little gusty, but aside from that it's okay. I don't recommend jumping when it's raining. Too much chance of slipping. (*Laughs.*) It's just a little joke I always throw in. Usually kills 'em.

PETE. Come on, come on. I haven't got all day.

J.M. Of course. (*Assuming businesslike manner.*) First, you picked a lousy ledge. Right on a busy thoroughfare. Look down there. What do you see? Come on, tell me.

PETE (*looking down*). Cars...cars, more cars.

J.M. Right! Notice any people down there?

PETE (*realizing*). No.

J.M. See! Who's gonna know you jumped? Except for some joker whose car you hit, who's gonna know? You've just got to have a crowd. That brings us to lesson 4. (*Changing subject.*) Boy, I wish you had come to me sooner. I think your case would have been a real challenge. (*Slightly frustrated.*) Amateurs. I'll bet you'd have just loved the 634 or the 642.

PETE. 634?

J.M. It's...professional. You know, really says it all. It takes work but the results are perfect—sure-fire. (*Getting excited.*) You see, you get a gas oven, move it so that it

faces the front door. Then, get this. You strip naked, open the oven, turn the gas on, put your head in, and no matter who finds you they get the picture. Can you imagine your wife coming in the front door to be greeted by that?

PETE. I don't have a wife and I'm not about to strip naked for a bunch of strangers. All I'd get is a mild chuckle.

J.M. Well, to each his own.

PETE. What was the other one?

J.M. Well, if you can't take the 634, you certainly aren't ready for the 642. All right, back to business. Where were we? Environment? No. Oh yeah, lesson number 4: "Attention-getters." We need to drop something: a brick or a vase would do nicely.

PETE. I don't have a brick or a vase.

J.M. Look around. Gotta be something. Shame you couldn't have picked the public library. Those gargoyles are real loose but you had to jump into things. No use crying over spilt milk, as they always say.

PETE (*brightening*). How about a shoe?

J.M. Well, it's not the best but it'll do, I guess.

PETE (*taking off shoe cautiously and dropping it*). There.

J.M. Wait! Now what did you do that for, stupid?

PETE. You said drop it.

J.M. There is a correct and incorrect way to drop anything—even a shoe. Did you see that shoe hit the street? No! You know why? Because it landed on the fire escape down there. Just like you'll do if you don't follow directions. Now don't get so anxious.

PETE. I'm sorry.

J.M. Well, you should be. Okay, okay. Now let's try again and this time wait until I tell you.

PETE (*taking off other shoe*). I promise.

J.M. First you gotta get away from that stupid fire escape.

PETE. What'll I do?

J.M. Well, move, naturally. Try about five feet over.

(*PETE edges over.*) How's it look?

PETE. Nope. Fire escape still. (*Moves over farther.*) Okay, I've got a clear shot now.

J.M. Good. Now you want to hit someone, so take aim. And throw it out far. Allow for the Kentucky windage.

PETE. The what?

J.M. It's a business term. You have to aim ahead of the object you want to hit so that by the time the object you've thrown has reached the ground, it will hit the object you're trying to hit. In other words, in your case, you want the shoe to hit the car.

PETE. Oh. Okay, here goes. (*He loses balance and almost drops shoe.*) Whoaaaaaa.

J.M. (*grabbing him*). Careful now. You've still got some more lessons. And you could have dropped the shoe.

PETE. Okay. I won't let you down. Here goes. (*Starts to throw, then stops.*) Overhand or underhand?

J.M. Which are you better at?

PETE (*thinking hard*). Underhand!

J.M. So throw it underhand. Now aim first. There comes your car. Throw.

PETE (*throwing shoe and looking down*). There she goes.

J.M. Going...going...windshield! Perfect! Congratulations.

PETE. He's getting out and looking up.

J.M. (*shouting down*). Same to you, buddy.

PETE. He's motioning to someone. Hey, there's a woman looking up now, and...a man, and... Hey, I'm getting a crowd.

J.M. Like I tell you. There is a right and wrong way to do anything. Now wasn't it lucky you bumped into me today?

PETE. Gosh, yes. Do I jump now?

J.M. Patience, my boy, patience. Don't be so anxious. Wait for the police and firemen. Maybe even television.

PETE. You're kidding.

J.M. Nope. Happened only last week to one of my clients. He was a real winner—fantastic. Of course he had had training. He went out in front of a million viewers—eating dinner. I was really proud of him.

PETE. Was he the one on Grand Central?

J.M. That was my boy. One of my real successes. A job like that makes all the hard work worthwhile. You don't come across a talent like that every day.

PETE. I saw him. Boy! Just as the fireman reached for him, he let go.

J.M. Timing, my boy, timing. Takes practice but you could do it. Oh, if I had only gotten to you earlier. I just feel it that you would have been...another Mr. Big.

PETE. How long before the fire engines?

J.M. Not long. The police take longer. And then, if you're lucky, comes the television.

PETE. The crowd's getting bigger and bigger. What do I do now?

J.M. Okay, now you've gotta stagger like you're slipping. That always excites the crowd. Tension—keep 'em taut, make 'em gasp. If you do that several times, it almost guarantees TV coverage.

PETE. How do I do it?

J.M. Just lean out, but be sure and hang on with the back hand. Grab that cornerstone. And be careful, don't fall.