

FALLING OFF THE EDGE

By
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FALLING OFF THE EDGE

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FALLING OFF THE EDGE

Falling Off the Edge was produced by Onion Man Productions, under the direction of Scott King, featuring the following cast:

Belinda Morris... Morgan Colburn
Carly Howe..... Rebecca Carrico
Matt Ballard..... Benjamin Lamm

It was subsequently produced by Palaver Tree Theater, under the direction of Chuck Robinson, featuring the following cast:

Belinda Morris ... Megan Majewski
Carly Howe. Aiko Austen
Matt Ballard..... Jason Adams

CAST: 2 Women/1 Man

BELINDA MORRIS... 30s, a recovering alcoholic with a veneer of confidence over a fragile core.

CARLY HOWE..... 30s, also a recovering alcoholic, good-hearted, with a deeply ingrained frugality.

MATT BALLARD..... 30s, a Mormon swimmer who is afraid of the ocean.

TIME: Winter, 2018.

PLACE: A beach resort in Costa Rica.

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ACT I SCENE 1

2018. Tuesday. The poolside at a resort in Costa Rica. At least four comfortable chaise lounges are visible facing downstage. Other tropical décor as budgets permit. Early morning. Bright sun. The play of lights downstage suggests a pool running the length of the playing area with a lone swimmer completing regular laps. A single towel sits on the chaise longue farthest R. The peace is broken by the unmistakable thwack-thwack-thwack of flip-flops against bare feet. BELINDA enters. She is not wearing flip-flops. She wears smart and silent little sandals and a flattering but not showy swimsuit with a matching beach cover. She is carrying a darling little summer bag. Belinda is reasonably nice-looking, but she carries herself with a practiced confidence that makes her seem more attractive. Belinda stands and waits but does not look behind her. After a beat CARLY is heard from off.

CARLY. I'm coming. ... I'm coming ... (Carly bursts on, flip-flops thwacking. She is wearing cut-offs over her bikini. She's struggling with a beach satchel of epic proportions and doesn't seem willing to use her hands. She is also wearing, most incongruously, a pair of huge round "Jackie O" sunglasses.) I have to tell you; this is not how I dreamt of starting this vacation.

BELINDA. You have mentioned that. In passing.

CARLY. Nothing on a vacation should start before 10.

BELINDA. (Proceeding to a chaise.) I told you, three hours of sun before ten is less damaging than half an hour of sun between ten and two.

CARLY. Is that true?

BELINDA. Have you ever seen me with a burn?

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CARLY. It's just not natural. We're up before the coffee shop is even open! *(Belinda has been giving Carly an appraising look.)* What?

BELINDA. You know ...

CARLY. What?

BELINDA. You know I would put out my own eyes with a ballpoint pen before I'd say a word in judgment...

CARLY. I have several ballpoint pens right here.

BELINDA. No doubt. *(Belinda takes a few steps. Carly doesn't move.)* What?

CARLY. I am not budging until you spit it out.

BELINDA. Are you sure?

CARLY. Belinda ...

BELINDA. Well, if you insist ... *(Carly waits.)* It's two things, really. *(Carly waits.)* There's a mirror in our room.

CARLY. One of our "four-star amenities."

BELINDA. So you must be able to see that the Daisy Mae thing was old before you finished high school.

CARLY. I told you I was not going to go out and spend ... whatever you spent ... on a new swimsuit ... when I have one that fits just fine.

BELINDA. That was probably debatable ten years ago.

CARLY. And what was number two?

BELINDA. It doesn't matter ... really...

CARLY. It matters more than you will ever know.

BELINDA. You swore to me you'd leave those damn glasses at home.

CARLY. I didn't swear.

BELINDA. You promised...

CARLY. I don't think so...

BELINDA. You lead me to believe...

CARLY. I may have done that.

BELINDA. Then why?

CARLY. I tried ... I wanted to ... for you. But I just couldn't face the waste. These are a perfectly good pair of sunglasses. I don't need a second pair. And I paid \$40 for these. Forty dollars.

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BELINDA. And I know it must have killed you, but it was also a dozen years ago. If you amortize, it means they cost you \$3.34 a year. Inexpensive even to you!

CARLY. Do I begrudge you your extravagance?

BELINDA. I don't see living in comfort I can afford as extravagance.

CARLY. Could anyone possibly need \$800 sheets?

BELINDA. They were on sale. I saved \$1200 on the set. How could that be extravagant?

CARLY. Shall we proceed?

BELINDA. (*Spotting the towel.*) How about right here?

CARLY. Here? (*Belinda nods.*) We're not going to the beach?

BELINDA. The beach isn't open yet.

CARLY. It's a beach. It never closes.

BELINDA. They don't start giving out chairs until nine.

CARLY. And god forbid you should lie on a towel on the sand. (*Belinda looks at Carly as though her statement had been in Esperanto.*) Right. How about, why couldn't we wait until 9? Wouldn't want an extra ninety minutes of sleep to keep these alluring bags from developing under our eyes? Wasn't that in last month's Cosmo? How to Get Those Dark and Swollen Eyes Men Are Mad For!

BELINDA. Have you ever even held a Cosmo?

CARLY. Of course not. It's a point of honor. (*Carly struggles awkwardly trying to carry her bag without using her hands.*)

BELINDA. What are you do ... oh for god's sake! It's a manicure. Your hands weren't suddenly transformed into glass.

CARLY. For \$80 – plus tip! – this is going to last until Christmas.

BELINDA. It was my \$80.

CARLY. It was still \$80.

BELINDA. People go every week, y'know.

CARLY. Not this person! It would give me hives to throw away money like that.

BELINDA. "I'm worth it." "I'm worth it." "I'm worth it."

CARLY. Sometimes good common sense isn't a self-esteem issue! (*Belinda laughs and settles in a chaise, funnily enough nearest the one*

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with a towel.) Sixty chairs and you had to pick the one ... *(The coin drops.)* ... oh. *(She looks toward the pool.)* Three hours of sun before ten?

BELINDA. Tipping well has its rewards. Those girls in the spa know everyone and everything that happens here.

CARLY. Down to when he'd be swimming?

BELINDA. Angela said you could set your clock by him.

CARLY. How much did this fount of information cost you?

BELINDA. You really must get beyond this obsession with my spending.

CARLY. 20%? *(Belinda shakes her head.)* 25%? *(Belinda gestures up.)* Big up? *(Belinda nods.)* Not 50...

BELINDA. Of course not.

CARLY. Oh good...

BELINDA. Double it.

CARLY. What? ... You're kidding? ... 100% ... You tipped ... There's just no way ... 100%?

BELINDA. I didn't want gossip, I wanted the truth.

CARLY. I hope you get your money's worth.

BELINDA. You make it sound like I'm paying for him.

CARLY. A gigolo might have been cheaper. And a sure thing.

BELINDA. We are supposed to be putting our histories behind us.

CARLY. I trust you'll cough demurely when it's time for me to go book a day tour to the volcano.

BELINDA. I'm not planning to sleep with him this morning.

CARLY. Your restraint is heroic. You should be addressing Christian Youth groups.

BELINDA. Are you familiar with the parable of the glass house and the stones?

CARLY. You're right. This trip is not about histories. It's about moving forward...

BELINDA. This from a woman wearing a 10-year-old bikini and 12-year-old sunglasses.

CARLY. Think of them as vintage. Like Scotch.

BELINDA. Neither one of us needs to be thinking of Scotch.

CARLY. True dat.

BELINDA. Do you have the sunscreen?

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CARLY. Like it was going to fit in your little evening bag. (*Rifling through her tote.*) Do you want 50 or 75?

BELINDA. Do you have any of the 15?

CARLY. You are not ready for 15.

BELINDA. We're not going to be here long and it smells so much better.

CARLY. Right. (*Handing her the 15.*) The Shalimar of tanning products. Want me to get your back?

BELINDA. (*Posing ala Rita Hayworth.*) I'm not planning to lie on my stomach this morning.

CARLY. Do you know him? Have you even met him?

BELINDA. If I had met him we wouldn't need to be out here at 7:30 in the morning.

CARLY. In your extensive research, did his name come up?

BELINDA. Matt. So there.

CARLY. Can you do my back?

BELINDA. Sure. Do you mind 15? I don't want to get the other smells on my hands.

CARLY. Perish the thought. (*Looking toward the water.*) He's steady.

BELINDA. You know there's no reason on this earth you can't meet someone for yourself.

CARLY. Oh, I could never do that. Now that I've cleaned up my act, I'm saving myself for Lil' Abner.

BELINDA. Do you have my magazine? (*Carly tosses the magazine disdainfully to Belinda.*) Hey, it's not Cosmo!

CARLY. The New York Review of Books, I presume.

BELINDA. Of course not. It's a point of honor. (*Belinda begins glancing lightly through her magazine. Carly surreptitiously extracts a hardbound copy of John Gardner's Grendel from her canvas sack. Carly is almost immediately absorbed in her book.*) There's something just wrong about a hardcover at the pool

CARLY. Think of me as intellectually diabetic. Mind candy would put me in a coma.

BELINDA. (*Gazing toward the water.*) He really is focused, isn't he?

CARLY. Just hypothetically ...

BELINDA. Uh-oh.

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CARLY. If two guys came down first thing in the morning to watch an attractive woman swim alone in a pool, wouldn't you find it a little creepy? Or would that just be another form of meeting cute?

BELINDA. Why must you always be such a ray of sunshine? And it's an idiotic analogy. We're not guys. He's not a girl. It's not the same. Larry Summers wasn't wrong about everything.

CARLY. Dear god, that's the last time I let you near the New York Times.

BELINDA. Did Elle Woods teach you nothing? It's possible to be beautiful, shallow, spoiled and still aware of the world around you. ... Good lord, how many times can he swim back and forth and back and forth without going crazy? At least when you run you can wear a Walkman.

CARLY. That could be our fortune!

BELINDA. What?

CARLY. Well, if women didn't lack the genetic wiring necessary to function in basic science and engineering, we could invent the Waterman and be rich.

BELINDA. Where would he tuck it? *(They giggle.)* Have you got a sketchpad and pencil in that thing? I want to get to work.

CARLY. Sorry.

BELINDA. You've got everything else in the world in there. Check beneath Jimmy Hoffa. *(Together they watch MATT swim a lap up and a lap back. And a lap up and a lap back.)*

CARLY. Walk me through the difference between this and stalking.

BELINDA. Read your book.

CARLY. That's the best you can do?

BELINDA. It's not stalking. It's staging. I'm taking the principles that kept me a platinum achiever seven years running and applying them to my less successful personal life. Besides, he's not a celebrity. Now read your book. *(Carly picks up Grendel and is almost immediately engrossed. Belinda flips through her Vogue. She glances toward the water and back to Vogue. And over toward Carly and back to Vogue. And again to the water. Finally, she sets the Vogue on Matt's chaise and lowers the back of her chaise.)*

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SCENE 2

20 minutes later. Belinda's chaise is flat, she is asleep on her stomach. Her contortion is not especially erotic or appealing. Carly is upright and still absorbed in her book. She has made measurable progress. The sense of motion from the pool abates. Matt enters. He is indeed gorgeous. He is wearing a somewhat worn, but still serviceable Speedo. He stops, puzzled, when he sees Carly and Belinda. As he crosses to his towel, Carly lowers her book and follows him with her gaze. Matt collects his towel and dries his hair, back, and legs while facing away from Carly. HE turns as he mops his chest. Carly drops her book loudly next to Belinda's chaise. She shakes the chaise. Belinda stirs but doesn't waken.

CARLY. What's that hon? A little more sun block? Sure thing. *(Carly straddles Belinda with a tube of sun block in her hand. She shakes Belinda vigorously. Then, sotto voce:)* Belinda! ... Come on. ...

MATT. *(Picking up the Vogue.)* Your friend's?

CARLY. *(Nods.)* I thought she might need a little more sun block.

MATT. She's not in much danger before ten.

CARLY. You know, I've heard that. *(She kicks Belinda as she crosses off the chaise.)*

BELINDA. *(Groggily.)* What the hell ... Jesus, Carly what time... *(Carly gestures with her head toward Matt.)* What??? ... Oh. *(She turns slowly toward him.)* Good morning.

MATT. Hello.

BELINDA. Good swim?

MATT. There aren't many bad ones. *(They are all silent.)* I wasn't expecting company this early.

BELINDA. Our time here is so short we didn't want to waste a minute of it, did we Carly?

CARLY. Nope. Not a second. *(They are all silent.)* I'm going to go see if the coffee shop is open yet. Can I bring anybody anything?

MATT. No thanks. I'm going to head back to my room. *(Carly and Belinda exchange a look.)*

CARLY. Your roommate's not a swimmer?

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MATT. I've got a single.

BELINDA. Don't rush off.

MATT. I don't drink coffee.

CARLY. Tea? (*Matt shakes his head.*) How about a water? You must be parched. All the difference in the world between being in the water and being able to drink it...

MATT. That's true.

CARLY. (*To Belinda.*) Skim milk? Three Splenda?

BELINDA. You're a doll. Thanks.

MATT. I should really ...

CARLY. (*Exiting quickly.*) I'll be right back! (*Matt spreads his towel across his chaise and lies out. Belinda moves slowly and with surprising subtlety into an approximation of her "Rita Hayworth" pose.*)

BELINDA. So, you're here by yourself? (*Matt nods.*) That's unusual.

MATT. I figured it was the best way to really unwind. No one to be polite to. No one else's schedule to consider.

BELINDA. Where is home?

MATT. Park City.

BELINDA. Utah?

MATT. Yup.

BELINDA. This must make quite a change.

MATT. That was the point.

BELINDA. Do you ski?

MATT. Do you?

BELINDA. No. But I don't live at a ski resort.

MATT. Where do you...

BELINDA. Bethesda.

MATT. Like the angel? (*Belinda looks at him quizzically.*) Never mind.

BELINDA. Bethesda, Maryland. Just outside of Washington, DC. And tiny Costa Rica brings us together.

MATT. They really lay on the chlorine here. I should go grab a shower.

BELINDA. Am I keeping you from a breakfast date?

MATT. No ... It's not that ...

BELINDA. Then doesn't it seem kind of mean to send Carly off for water and then not be here when she returns?

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MATT. I suppose ...

BELINDA. (*After a beat of awkward silence.*) Is this your first time here?

MATT. Yeah. It's basically my second time outside of Utah since I was three.

BELINDA. You traveled so much in your early years that now you're a homebody?

MATT. Something like that.

BELINDA. Why Costa Rica?

MATT. My little brother came here on his honeymoon last year and really liked it. What brings you and ...

BELINDA. Carly.

MATT. What brings you and Carly here?

BELINDA. Just two girlfriends looking for a little adventure.

MATT. That's nice.

BELINDA. Not "girlfriends" of course. But women friends would sound even dykier, don't you think? You have to be so careful these days. I started calling Patty Moran my "girlfriend" in junior high. Then sophomore year in college she came out. The girlfriend business had to come to an abrupt halt!

MATT. You could just say friends.

BELINDA. Well aren't you solution oriented!

MATT. How did you and Carly meet? Work?

BELINDA. Mutual friends. My name is Belinda.

MATT. Matt. (*Shaking her hand.*) Pleased to meet you. ... I wonder if Carly needs a hand...

BELINDA. She'll be fine. She's wonderfully competent ... at so many things ... and has years of experience waitressing. ... Do you swim every morning?

MATT. I've been swimming as long as I can remember. I'm actually not so good at it. Was never a star at meets, but I love it. I can't imagine starting a day without it. It helps me focus. It's the best, most peaceful time of the day.

BELINDA. I do better in the air. Tennis, biking, skating. No one thing for too long. I get bored. ... Of sports. Not with people, of course. ... Not that

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I'm clingy or demanding with people ... Why don't you get out of Utah more often?

MATT. Never saw a reason to.

BELINDA. And what was the reason now?

MATT. My staff kept razzing me about never taking a vacation, never going anywhere. They threatened to go on a vacation strike themselves. Utah's a right to work state, but I didn't want them to make it a right to overwork. So, I decided to show 'em.

BELINDA. Your staff?

MATT. I have a ski equipment company.

BELINDA. You seem so young...

MATT. It's a small ski equipment company.

BELINDA. So you make miniature ski equipment?

MATT. *(Laughing.)* No.

CARLY. *(Bustling on. She has a bottled water tucked under her arm and two cardboard coffee cups trapped oddly between her hands. Her fingers are still splayed, protecting her manicure.)* The coffee shop was open, thank god!

MATT. *(Racing to her.)* Here, let me help ...

BELINDA. Oh, for heaven's sake.

CARLY. Thanks. Take the water, please.

MATT. Sure. *(Takes the water from under her arm.)* How about one of those coffees?

CARLY. Okay. Take the one in front. That's Belinda's. *(He takes the cup and takes it to Belinda.)* Four-star service doesn't include skim milk, I'm afraid.

BELINDA. That's fine.

MATT. Here you go.

BELINDA. Thanks.

CARLY. Oddly they did have Splenda.

MATT. *(Taking Carly's cup as she sits.)* Did you hurt your hand?
(Belinda smirks.)

CARLY. Oh. No. No. It's nothing. I'm fine. Really. Fine.

MATT. *(Returning her cup.)* Okay. *(Carly makes herself grasp the coffee cup normally.)* Thanks for the water.

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CARLY. You're welcome. (*All three sit staring at the empty pool.*) This was much more entertaining when you were in there.

BELINDA. Doesn't she have the most unique sense of humor?

MATT. (*Standing and picking up his towel.*) I would offer to let you come watch me shower, but I'm afraid you'd accept.

CARLY. Do you have plans for lunch?

MATT. (*Caught off guard.*) No. I don't think I do. No.

CARLY. Belinda, didn't Angela tell you about a wonderful little place in the village? Authentic, but inexpensive. With fabulous food - fresh fish and local fruits and vegetables. Didn't she say it was so good you'd hardly know it was healthy?

BELINDA. No. Not that I ... (*Ka-ching!*) ... Of course. That little place in the village that we've been dying to try.

CARLY. Since you don't have other plans, will you come along? Please?

MATT. (*Trapped.*) Sure. (*Realizing he is being surly.*) I'd be glad to. What time did you have in mind?

CARLY. How does 12:30 sound? Meet in the front driveway at 12:30?

BELINDA. Perfect.

MATT. Sure. That sounds great. ... I'm going to head up. See you at 12:30.

BELINDA. See you then. (*Matt exits.*) When the three of us have lunch.

CARLY. Don't be an idiot.

BELINDA. What?

CARLY. I'm not going to lunch.

BELINDA. He thinks you are.

CARLY. Then he wasn't listening. I never said I was going. You'll meet him at 12:30 and tell him I decided I had to go to the volcano or that Quaker settlement or that my hands were hurting too badly ... You've gotten through the awkward introductions, lunch will be a breeze.

BELINDA. I don't know ...

CARLY. Just don't push too hard. You don't have pose like a porn star to get a man's attention

BELINDA. Why can't it be as easy for me as it is for you?

CARLY. Was.

BELINDA. You have so many funny stories.

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CARLY. Funny in retrospect.

BELINDA. I can't help but feel that I didn't even drink as colorfully as you.

CARLY. We got here the same way. A drink at a time. Being drunk made me think I was catnip to men. But you don't want that. I did what I did. For stupid reasons. No point in regretting it, but I'd rather drink lye than relive it. Chlamydia is much less glamorous than it sounds.

BELINDA. Doesn't it sometimes feel like we're trying to trade places? Could be the next big reality show: Trading Personalities.

CARLY. More like Trading Defects

BELINDA. You want to learn to settle down and I want to learn to cut loose a little.

CARLY. He seems like nice way to start.

BELINDA. He's not interested in me.

CARLY. Oh now. Maybe you weren't the only pretty, but shy one out here. It may just take him some time to warm up.

BELINDA. I could sell him a condo in a heartbeat, but I have no idea how to sell him on me.

CARLY. It always comes down to plumbing, doesn't it?

BELINDA. I want to go home. This was a stupid idea.

CARLY. Don't make me sing the song ...

BELINDA. Anything but that.

CARLY. (*Wretchedly off key.*) Believe in yourself ... whoooooh ooooooh ... Believe in yourself as I believe in YOOOOOOOOOUUUUUUUUUUUUU!

BELINDA. Okay, okay, I'll drink the Kool-Aid.

CARLY. Just don't spike it.

BELINDA. No man is worth that.

CARLY. It's good to hear you say that.

BELINDA. You want to head out the beach for a little bit.

CARLY. I'll catch up with you. I'm going inside to reserve me a tour.

BELINDA. You're the best.

CARLY. Trust me, I'm charging it to you. (*tossing her the 75 sun block*) Here, take some smelly sun block. A burn won't improve your chances at lunch.

BELINDA. Thanks. (*Belinda and Carly exit in different directions.*)

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SCENE 3

The next day. Matt is lying on a chaise. Since he has the chaise flat, all we really see are the soles of his feet. Carly enters. She is carrying her flip-flops so as to make a stealthy approach. She approaches him slowly. When she sees that he's asleep, she drops the back of the neighboring chaise loudly, plunks herself on the chaise with as much commotion as she can muster and lies on her side facing him. Finally, in that unmistakable off-key way of hers, Carly begins to hum. If one listened really hard one might come to realize that she is humming Fleetwood Mac's "Say You Love Me." Carly means nothing by the melody, it's just what came into her head. Matt wakens suddenly, sees Carly and sits bolt upright. He is wearing a conspicuously new pair of brightly colored board shorts. He is also glazed in sun block.

MATT. Can I help you?

CARLY. Nope.

MATT. You just happened by.

CARLY. I was coming back in from the beach and I couldn't help but wonder ...

MATT. Yes?

CARLY. Well, here we are yards from one of the most beautiful beaches in the whole Pacific and here you are sitting alone by the pool.

MATT. Just looking for a little piece and quiet.

CARLY. Yes, but you haven't been to the ocean in the five days you've been here.

MATT. What?

CARLY. Don't bother to deny it. I have impeccable sources.

MATT. *(Standing.)* Okay.

CARLY. You don't have to be defensive about it.

MATT. About what?

CARLY. Being afraid of the ocean. *(Matt turns toward her with a wordless mix of fury and humiliation.)* Oh my god! I didn't really think ... I was teasing ... but you're such a good swimmer ...

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MATT. In a pool. With walls. With boundaries. I had never seen the ocean before ... I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect it to look so ... endless ... so infinite. Okay, yes, it spooks me. I don't understand why and I feel like an idiot. I know children play in it. I've seen them. Happy now?

CARLY. No ... I didn't mean ... I would never ...

MATT. You have a real gift. Setting me up yesterday, humiliating me today ... (*Grabbing his towel.*) What were you doing during the lunch disaster? Stealing the coins out of beggars' cups in the village square?

CARLY. Wait. Please. Please believe me, I would never, ever make fun of someone else's fears. I'm dumb and I'm tacky, but I don't have a mean bone in my body. Honestly.

MATT. (*After a beat.*) Anyone reading John Gardner couldn't be dumb.

CARLY. Did you go to college?

MATT. Yes.

CARLY. And you didn't know anyone who was well read, but stupid?

MATT. Who told you putting yourself down was attractive?

CARLY. Who told you I was trying to be attractive?

MATT. So how did you know my complete schedule?

CARLY. Belinda bribed the manicurist and the chair attendant.

MATT. So, I'm under 24-hour surveillance?

CARLY. Only 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Feel free to indulge in murder and mayhem from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Although she was going to talk to the bartender in the lounge tonight.

MATT. He's never seen me. This is too weird. I'm outta here tomorrow. I don't care what it costs to change my ticket.

CARLY. It's a free country. ... Did you know that it really is? They don't even have an army!

MATT. Your trip to Monteverde was educational then?

CARLY. I knew about the no army bit before we came here. I admit that I didn't know about the Quakers.

MATT. Conscientious objectors to the Korean War, I believe.

CARLY. Well. Can't wait to see you on Final Jeopardy.

MATT. Although I'm sure they prefer Society of Friends or Friends to "Quakers." Just as some people prefer "Latter Day Saints" to Mormons.

CARLY. Right. ... Are you a Mormon?

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MATT. Is that a problem?

CARLY. Are you surrounded by invisible barbed wire? Something can be a surprise without being a problem.

MATT. But why should it be a surprise?

CARLY. No horns, no cloven hooves ...

MATT. Isn't that an older denomination?

CARLY. Darlin', in my mother's house there were two kinds of people, the ones we saw at the First Church of the Flame of the Holy Spirit and the damned. Didn't really matter what kind of damned you were. You and the Catholics could split those hairs in the eternal fires.

MATT. Sounds like a difficult childhood.

CARLY. She did the best she could. Granted that wasn't good at all.

MATT. You do a nice job of keeping the scars hidden.

CARLY. You can only be a victim 'til you're 21. After that you're a volunteer. I finally stopped volunteering a little over a year ago.

MATT. That's better than most people.

CARLY. How much do you know about the volcano?

MATT. Arenal? After 400 years of dormancy, it erupted in 1968 and has been active since.

CARLY. Have you seen it? (*Matt shakes his head.*) Let me tell you, they're not kidding about the active part. I saw all that lava spewing and I thought, "Been there. Done that." (*Matt stares uncomprehendingly.*) Not much of a drinker?

MATT. We generally don't ...

CARLY. That's why no coffee or tea ... (*Matt nods.*) The caffeine thing. (*Matt nods.*) So you're still active ... in the ... LDS

MATT. Yes.

CARLY. Wow. I couldn't run fast enough ... What was it like?

MATT. What?

CARLY. A happy childhood?

MATT. For one thing, I was taught that speaking about my own good fortune is unseemly.

CARLY. Oh, go ahead, live large.

MATT. I was raised by two people I loved and who loved me. I still love them and still respect the way they live.

FALLING OFF THE EDGE

CARLY. Any brothers and sisters?

MATT. Four younger brothers.

CARLY. Good lord.

MATT. We give him credit, but we're all old enough to know it was really my father. *(Carly laughs.)* What about you? Any sibs?

CARLY. Nope. Just me and my mom. Do you know that saying, "Never mix, never worry"? *(Matt shakes his head.)* Well, it's like this. From 15 to 32 I never mixed. It was fifth of vodka pretty much every day. And I never worried except for the times my period was late.

MATT. You didn't really ...

CARLY. I am not exaggerating even slightly.

MATT. I can't imagine.

CARLY. As they say, there are two kinds of people ... the ones who can't imagine and the ones who do it. I wish I couldn't imagine. ... Can you keep a secret? Why am I asking? Why do I feel like I can trust you so much?

MATT. I don't know. Why am I still sitting here? After what you did yesterday...

CARLY. Belinda didn't feel lunch went well either.

MATT. Thank god. At least neither one of us will have to go through that again.

CARLY. Well ...

MATT. There's no possible way!

CARLY. Couldn't you just be a little bit nicer to her?

MATT. Why are you trying to push her on me? She seems quite capable of going after what she wants for herself.

CARLY. That's where you're wrong.

MATT. If she'd been a little subtler and little less desperate, lunch would have been a whole lot less depressing.

CARLY. She's had a bad time of it. She's so desperate because she has no confidence. Façade, sure but no real faith in herself. She just needs an attractive, straight man to be nice to her. Poor thing has a worse gaydar than Liza Minnelli.

(Matt stares, not comprehending.) Liza Minnelli? *(Matt shrugs and shakes his head.)* Praise be and Hallelujah! You really are straight.

MATT. That has never been in play.

FALLING OFF THE EDGE

CARLY. *(Again, awful.)* “What good is sitting alone in your room...”

MATT. All that vodka really tore up your vocal cords, didn’t it? *(Carly laughs.)* What was that song you were humming to wake me? *(Carly shrugs.)* Fleetwood Mac, wasn’t it? *(Matt tentatively hums a few bars of “Landslide” and shakes his head. He tries “Don’t Stop,” but that isn’t it either. As soon as he starts to hum “Say You Love Me” he smiles and Carly nods. He gestures for her to join in. She shakes her head. He keeps gesturing and begins to chase her across the deck. She is giggling. She slows down to let him catch her. He puts his arms around her from behind, holds her arms and begins to dance her rather exuberantly around the deck. Gradually they slow and HE turns her to face him and they slow dance for a few beats. Eventually, he kisses her lips gently. They continue dancing. She kisses him with a similar gentle, tentativeness. They continue dancing. They stop. Their eyes meet for a moment and they kiss more heatedly. Belinda enters. She starts to run off and then makes the decision to stay. Belinda walks past them to the middle of the deck.)*

BELINDA. Who would think ... at a beach resort ... that the action would be poolside? *(Carly starts to step away from Matt. He holds her. She looks at him but stops resisting. Belinda exits. Carly and Matt take a moment to look at one another.)*

CARLY. I should ...

MATT. Why?

CARLY. She’s my friend. We’ve seen each other through some things. I owe her a hell of a lot more than I owe you.

MATT. I’m sorry.

CARLY. It’s all right, just so you know. *(She begins to exit.)*

MATT. Carly ...

CARLY. Yeah?

MATT. I’d like to see you again.

CARLY. You can always find me on the beach. *(She exits. Matt sits on a chaise and watches Carly leave. He stares after her long after she’s gone. He turns front, bunches his towel in front of his face and screams into it as he falls back on the chaise.)*

FALLING OFF THE EDGE

SCENE 4

The beach. The next morning. The change in locale may be suggested by angling the chaises and using light to suggest water off stage. Or the change can be as elaborate as design and budget resources and directorial vision allow. Carly is lying on her stomach reading a paperback copy of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. She is wearing her old faithful bikini. Belinda's beach gear sits on another chaise. Belinda enters, she has been swimming. She is wearing a different, well-cut swimsuit that is part of a different smart little beach ensemble. She grabs a towel and dries off as Carly closes her book, rolls over and sits up.

BELINDA. The surf's quite a bit rougher today.

CARLY. Could there be a storm coming?

BELINDA. Won't change much for you, will it? As long as the lights stay on you can read in the room.

CARLY. Hey! I've done stuff. I've been to the volcano! *(Belinda shoots her a look.)* We could go this afternoon. I wouldn't mind going again.

BELINDA. I should have gone with you the first time. Instead of letting you push me into that awful lunch.

CARLY. Yeah. Y'know, I can turn over my will for my own life, but I still can't stop myself from trying to be "helpful" to other people. My worst amends tend to start with "I meant well ..."

BELINDA. Jesus. You even have a better program! I can't even pick a fight with you. Your side of the street is so clean it sparkles.

CARLY. I get it. If I was the one who was disappointed, I'd be lashing out at you.

BELINDA. *(After a long, long beat.)* No, you wouldn't. And that's what makes me really want to scream. You really wouldn't. But I can't help myself. It's just so frustrating. I can build a career, flush it away, and build it back again.

CARLY. I know.

BELINDA. But can I meet a man? Why is something so basic so hard? And why does it never get easier?

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CARLY. *(After a beat.)* I don't have an answer. And if I tried a slogan, you'd be justified in beating me to death with my book.

BELINDA. That would have been easier with the hardcover. *(Belinda spreads out a second towel on her chaise and prepares to lie on her stomach.)*

CARLY. Want some sunscreen?

BELINDA. Sure. Thanks.

CARLY. *(Beginning to apply sunscreen to Belinda's back.)* Wow. You are really tight. All over.

BELINDA. Yeah. Probably.

CARLY. *(Beginning to massage Belinda's shoulders more vigorously.)* Well, I'm not as good as the girls in the spa and this isn't quite as good as on a real table, but let's see if I can't loosen you up a little.

BELINDA. You don't have to ...

CARLY. Shh...

BELINDA. Really ...

CARLY. Really, shh. *(Belinda relents and Carly begins a thorough massage. After a few moments of Carly's ministrations, Belinda begins to cry.)* Oh god! Am I hurting you?

BELINDA. No.

CARLY. Should I stop?

BELINDA. No.

CARLY. Are you sure?

BELINDA. It's not you. This happens every time I let go even a little ... might as well get it out ...

CARLY. Okay. *(Carly continues the massage as Belinda continues weeping. Ultimately Carly begins to cry.)*

BELINDA. What?

CARLY. I can't do anything to help you ...

BELINDA. No. *(Carly continues the massage as both women continue crying.)*

MATT. *(Entering.)* I ... Oh. ... Is everything okay? *(Carly and Belinda stare at him, both still crying.)* I guess not. Of course not. Is there anything I can ...

CARLY. No.

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MATT. I guess I should ... (*Carly nods.*)

BELINDA. (*Shaking Carly off and composing herself quickly.*) No. Please ... Don't let us scare you off the beach for good! (*Matt is startled.*) Carly mentioned your anxiety. (*Carly looks away.*)

MATT. Oh.

BELINDA. And you came down to give it shot today ...

MATT. Well

BELINDA. That's really the way, isn't it? Just keep trying ...

MATT. I thought maybe I could do it if Carly came in with me.

BELINDA. A man who can ask for help? Don't let this one get away, Carly. (*Carly has still not turned back to face them.*) I'm not used to being the third wheel, but this must be what it feels like.

MATT. No ...

BELINDA. That's very sweet. But I really, really need to cool off.
(*Belinda exits.*)

MATT. Sorry.

CARLY. (*Turning back to him.*) Why?

MATT. My timing ...

CARLY. I did tell you I'd be at the beach.

MATT. And here we are.

CARLY. (*Miserably.*) I'm glad.

MATT. Do I believe your words or your look?

CARLY. Both?

MATT. That's not going to scare me off.

CARLY. What?

MATT. I can do complicated. I've done it all my life.

CARLY. Mr. Perfect Family? Mr. Perfect Childhood?

MATT. My birth parents died when I was three. I remember a little of my mother. She had brown hair that was kind of blown back and her smell. A few years ago, I learned the smell was a perfume called "Charlie."

CARLY. She must have been young.

MATT. They were just about our age when they died.

CARLY. Car wreck?

MATT. My mother killed my father then my father's girlfriend killed her in self-defense.

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CARLY. You're joking, right?

MATT. Why would I joke about that? I've seen the police reports.

CARLY. Wow.

MATT. I grew up Mormon in Salt Lake City. I have access to every possible piece of information about them ...

CARLY. How do the parents who raised you feel about that?

MATT. It was their idea. They have very generous spirits. They adopted me when I was three and a half. It was tough enough for them not to have kids of their own, but to adopt a toddler instead of an infant made them even greater outliers.

CARLY. How many did they adopt?

MATT. Just me.

CARLY. I thought you said you had brothers.

MATT. Yup. The four fireplugs.

CARLY. Fireplugs?

MATT. My brothers are all short and stocky and fair and very, very blonde. Like my father. They all played football and wrestled. Successfully. While I always swam. Earnestly. I started calling them the blonde fireplugs when there were only two, but it fits them all.

CARLY. I recall that the church puts a premium on large families.

MATT. Yeah. But in Utah, five isn't large.

CARLY. No offense, but I'm glad I'm not an LDS woman.

MATT. My parents had been told they couldn't have children. Hence the adoption. So when Joseph came along they were shocked, but thrilled. Somehow I got some of the credit. It was never articulated, but the sense that there was some cause and effect thing between adopting me and having Joseph permeated the house. I got as many smiles as the baby did! After Ian, brother number three, was born my father said to me, only semi-facetiously, "Hey buddy, think you could arrange for a sister next time?"

CARLY. I feel sorry for your last brother.

MATT. Oh don't. Joseph, Ephraim, Ian and I all say that John got off lucky because by the time he came along the rest of us had exhausted our parents so that they didn't have the energy to discipline him. I mean, they let him drink *regular* diet Coke *in the house*.

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CARLY. I can't even imagine. My mother's house was full of rules, but there wasn't much affection or laughter. I felt like I was always wearing a choke chain.

MATT. What about your father? Your mother doesn't sound like someone who would cotton to divorce.

CARLY. I'm still trying to figure out how she cottoned to conception. She told me my father was a soldier who died before I was born. Now I was born in December 1983. What war was there for him to die in? She was always weak on specifics but there was a clear implication that he had died heroically in combat. Unlike your parents, she didn't answer questions any more readily than she volunteered information.

MATT. Have you been able to learn anything on your own?

CARLY. I've learned that the little she told me isn't true, but nothing that is. When I was about 7, she made this very reverent presentation of small box of medals that she said he had been awarded. I was only too happy to buy into the "my daddy, the hero" myth.

MATT. Well sure ...

CARLY. About the time I started junior high, I figured out they were bogus. They weren't all from the same time. One was from the Korean War. I figured he must have died a really, really slow death. (*Matt is not sure how to take this.*) Think of the jokes as life preservers in quotation marks.

MATT. Irony is not my first language.

CARLY. Lucky bastard.

MATT. I know.

CARLY. The vodka started not long after the medals discovery. It was a way of easing the pain. I didn't feel pain for almost two decades.

MATT. I bet that's not true.

CARLY. Don't bet a lot. ... Not that there weren't challenges. Her endless and ever-changing rules and her hostility toward everything and everyone that made me even slightly happy. There was an inviolable rule against riding in cars with boys. Or dating. Or going out at night for any reason other than to attend church with her. Okay. I wasn't looking for trouble. I obeyed every rule. So I didn't ride in a car with a boy the whole time I

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lived in her house. I didn't date. I didn't go out at night for any reason other than to attend church with her.

MATT. That does sound pretty constrained.

CARLY. But there was no rule against giving blowjobs under the bleachers at lunch. So that's how I got to spend time with boys. And, in exchange, the boys made sure I had my supply of vodka.

MATT. That sounds really sad.

CARLY. It didn't seem sad at the time. It was just life. What's sad is how long the vodka continued to flow and how I never learned to relate to men on any other level ... and, god in heaven, I can't believe I'm saying this to you!! You're a sane, attractive man and I'm telling you things I wouldn't tell a therapist.

MATT. Thank you, I think. It's okay, I think.

CARLY. No, it's not. It's self-sabotage beyond even my usual high standard.

MATT. Well, we've had somewhat different life-experiences on the surface.

CARLY. "On the surface"?

MATT. You grew up feeling you didn't belong in the hell you were stuck in and I grew up feeling like an imposter in the heaven I was given.

CARLY. You think there's common ground?

MATT. I do. Absolutely. Don't you? *(Carly doesn't respond.)* Carly?

CARLY. I'm afraid to believe that there is. *(Matt takes her hand.)* And I hate the timing.

MATT. You can't be happy if it makes your friend unhappy?

CARLY. See you don't want to get mixed up with a nutcase!

MATT. Apparently, I do.

CARLY. *(Looking toward the ocean.)* She has really swum out pretty far.

MATT. No danger she'll be back too soon this time. *(Matt pulls her gently into an embrace. They kiss.)*

CARLY. Why me?

MATT. I have no idea. But you have been my every waking thought for two days. *(Another kiss.)*

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CARLY. Okay. Let's take a breath. *(She sits. He sits behind her and She nestles against him. They are facing the ocean.)* My head is going to explode ...

MATT. Let's not analyze ... let the moment be.

CARLY. Why does that always sound so reasonable, yet so impossible. *(He holds her gently. She relaxes a little.)* I see your point about the ocean. It really is freakin' endless. *(He nuzzles her hair happily. SHE sits up suddenly.)* Matt ...

MATT. Yes?

CARLY. She's out there too far.

MATT. Now Carly ...

CARLY. Really. She hasn't moved in a while. *(She stands.)* It really looks like she's trying to come back in and can't make it.

MATT. Do you really think ... *(They continue peering toward the ocean.)* You could be right. She looks stuck somehow ...

CARLY. *(Panic rising.)* We have to do something! *(Matt glances about frantically.)* Those guys just put out the chairs! They aren't lifeguards!! *(Matt looks at her his own panic rising.)* I can't swim at all! I never learned ...

MATT. Oh god.

CARLY. You have to ... *(Matt sits.)* Matt!

MATT. I don't know if I can.

CARLY. Matt, please! *(Matt bows his head.)* What are you doing?

MATT. *(Softly.)* Praying.

CARLY. Matt, come on ... *(Matt stands and peels off his shirt. He starts toward the ocean and then turns back to look at her. He is nauseous with fear.)*

MATT. I ...

CARLY. Go! Just GO! *(Matt turns and runs off. Carly watches for a few moments with increasing agitation. She sits with her hands over her mouth and begins to rock, still watching. She stands and takes a few steps toward the ocean.)* Come on. Come on. ... Oh Jesus, bring them both back. Please, bring them both back. *(She sits again. She picks up Matt's t-shirt and crushes it against her chest. More rocking. She looks away.)* I can't watch. *(After several beats she looks back toward the ocean.)* Oh god.

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Come on, Matt. Come on! *(She jumps to her feet.)* Please god, bring him back. I swear I'll never ask for anything again. *(Carly can't watch. She looks away. She can't not watch. She looks back.)* Almost there. Almost there. Almost there. *(She kneels.)* Almost. Almost there. Please. Please. ... YES! Oh, thank God. ... Don't fight him. ... Come on. Come on ... *(She leans back, kneading and balling the shirt frantically. She is nearly hyperventilating. She catches herself and attempts to slow her breathing. She jumps to her feet and begins waving the t-shirt above her head.)* Come on! Come on! You can do it. ... Come on, Matt! You can do it ... No, don't slow down. Come ON! *(She wraps her head in the t-shirt and dances frantic circles around the beach. She stops and lowers the t-shirt.)* please, please, please, please, please, please, please ... Oh Matt, please ... *(She watches in absolute stillness for several beats. She tosses the t-shirt onto a chaise, grabs a towel and runs off.)* Here you guys. Here! Oh Matt. Oh, thank God! Thank God! ... Oh, you did it. Here. Oh, thank God! *(Carly, Matt and Belinda enter. Carly and Matt are on either side of Belinda as they walk her on. Belinda is disheveled and disoriented, but not unconscious. Both Matt and Belinda are struggling for breath. Carly has managed to drape the towel around Belinda's shoulders. They stumble toward the row of chaises. Carly quickly spreads a towel and she and Matt help Belinda get seated. Carly hands Matt a towel which HE accepts but holds at his side without using. His breathing is still quite labored. She turns her attention back to Belinda.)* Are you okay?

BELINDA. *(Still struggling for breath.)* Fine. ... Now. *(To Matt.)* Thank you.

CARLY. God yes, thank you. *(To Belinda.)* Should we get you to a hospital? A doctor?

BELINDA. No. I. Will. Be. Fine.

CARLY. *(To Matt.)* Should we? *(Matt shrugs uncertainly.)* Here. Lay back. *(Carly helps Belinda recline and covers her torso and legs with towels. Belinda rolls to her side and begins to retch. No production, just heaves. Matt drops the towel he has been holding and dashes off. He begins to vomit. Carly is sitting with her hand on Belinda's back but looking after Matt with concern. Belinda's retching tapers off.)*

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BELINDA. Go. *(Carly races off, stopping to pick up the towel on her way. Belinda rolls on her back and moans involuntarily. Carly returns guiding Matt who has the towel over his shoulders but is shivering. She helps him sit on the side of a chaise.)*

CARLY. Here. *(She helps him put on his t-shirt and wraps the towel around his legs.)* Damn. I wish we had more towels. *(Belinda moans softly and coughs. Carly crosses to her and lifts the back of her chaise so that she is on a slight incline, rather than lying flat.)* Better? *(Belinda nods.)* I'm afraid there are no pillows.

BELINDA. It's okay. I'll be okay.

CARLY. You freaking well better be! ... Rest. *(Carly crosses back to Matt, sits at his side, and takes his hand.)* Are you okay? *(Matt nods.)* You did a great, brave thing. *(Matt squeezes her hand but doesn't otherwise respond. End of Act I.)*

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