

# Cast Away

(Drama) (2000)

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## Major Characters

- Chuck Noland.....Tom Hanks  
 A manager for the Federal Express Delivery Company (“Fed Ex”), who lives in Memphis, Tennessee, but travels all over the world for his job. A very nice, smart and resourceful man who is always fighting the passage of time.
- Kelly Frears.....Helen Hunt  
 Chuck’s charming girlfriend, who used to work for Fed Ex, but who is now working on her Ph.D. degree.
- Stan.....Nick Searly  
 A friend of Chuck’s at Fed Ex, whose wife is dying of cancer.

## Plot Summary

This is the story of Chuck Nolan, a midlevel manager for the Fed Ex Delivery Company, which is one of the two biggest delivery companies in the United States. Chuck lives in Memphis, Tennessee, where Fed Ex is based. He is planning to marry his girlfriend, Kelly, who is finishing up a Ph.D. (The highest academic degree). Kelly loves Chuck very much, but is frustrated by how much he works, especially since he travels overseas a lot. When the film opens, Chuck is helping Fed Ex set up their office in Moscow, Russia.

One day while flying to Australia, Chuck’s Fed Ex plane crashes during a storm, and as the only survivor, he suddenly finds himself on a very small and empty island, with virtually nothing to eat except crabs and coconuts. As the days turn into months and then years, Chuck learns to physically survive, but he must also face the emotional challenge of being completely alone (except for the company of “Wilson,” who is in fact nothing more than a volleyball with a painted face).

After several years, Chuck decides to risk his life in a courageous attempt to sail off the island. If he fails, he will drown in the ocean, but even if he is successful, he will face the new challenge of returning to friends and family that thought he had died several years earlier....

A note on the title: A “castaway” is a person stuck on a small island, usually after a ship sinks. “To cast away” something is to throw it away.

## Some Words and Expressions that You May not Know

***Chuck teaches the Russians about Fed Ex and time....***

I'll have another pick-up for you on Thursday.

In the Fed Ex or delivery business, this is a noun that refers to the act of picking up a package.

Time rules over us without mercy, not caring whether we are healthy or ill...

"Mercy" is the willingness to forgive or not punish, or perhaps another word for compassion. If a person is "ill," they are physically sick.

We live or die by the clock.

This is Chuck's philosophy of life; Time is the most critical factor in work and life.

We never allow ourselves the sin of losing track of time.

A "sin" is a religious word that refers to an evil or immoral act that God does not approve of.

That's how much time before the pulsating, accursed relentless taskmaster tries to put us out of business.

If something is "pulsating," it is beating strongly, like your heart after you exercise. "Accursed" is a rare word meaning cursed, which itself means likely to face destruction or great harm. If a person is "relentless," they never stop to rest, and a "taskmaster" is a person who forces others to work on many projects or assignments (A 'task' is a physical act of labor).

50,000,000 Elvis fans can't be wrong!

The name of a well known Elvis Presley album.

I took the liberty of sending this to myself; I fed ex'd it before I left Memphis.

"To take the liberty" of doing something is a fancy way of saying to do it, even if others may not approve. Note that "to fed-ex" a package has become a common verb, meaning to send it by fed-ex.

It is a clock that I started at absolute zero hour.

A technical way of referring to midnight at Greenwich, England.

Technical drawings. Architectural plans.

These are official drawings that architects or engineers design in order to build houses or other buildings.

87 hours is a shameful outrage! This is just an egg-timer.

"Shameful" is a strong adjective meaning very badly done. An "outrage" is a very bad, cruel or scandalous action that causes great anger. An "egg-timer" is a device used to measure the passage of a few minutes time, usually by having sand fall through a tube of glass.

Adoption papers.

The official papers that are needed in order to adopt a child.

87 hours is an **eternity!**

A great word which means forever, or perhaps until the end of time.

The cosmos were created in less time.

A scientific word that refers to the entire universe.

Wars have been fought and nations toppled in 87 hours!

“To topple” an enemy is to crush or completely defeat them.

When his truck **broke down**, he stole a boy’s bicycle to do his delivery.

If any kind of machine “breaks down,” it stops working.

15 minutes! Crunch time!

A slangy way of referring to a very important time in which people must act very quickly and effectively in order to accomplish a goal.

The truck in Red Square is stuck!

“Red Square” is the historic center of Moscow, Russia.

If a car or truck is “stuck,” it will not move.

Tick tock, tick tock!

The sound that a clock makes. Chuck’s way of telling people to hurry.

I’m doing the sorts in the middle of

Red Square....in the shadow of Lenin’s tomb.

“To sort” mail is to organize it, though note that in the fed-ex world, it can be used as a noun! “Lenin’s tomb” is where the Russian leader’s body has been housed since 1924 (Thousands still visit it each day).

I’m outta here in 2 minutes and I’m picking up the sweep through Paris.

Note that “out of” becomes “outta” in rapid speech. “I’m outta here” is a slangy way of saying “I’m leaving.” In this case, “the sweep” is a plane that travels through Paris on the way to the US (but this is never used).

Try U.P.S

United parcel Service, which is Fed Ex’s main competition.

With this extra head wind, are we going to be able to push it and make the sort?

“Head wind” is wind that blows against the direction of a plane or boat. Remember that in the fed-ex world, a “sort” is the act of organizing packages (Chuck is asking if they can deliver the packages in time).

Jack keeps getting certified to fly?

“To certify” a person to do something like fly a plane is to officially approve of them doing it, often by giving them a license to do it.

That's the spirit! Relentless is our goal!

“That’s the spirit” is a way of encouraging a person after they show they are going to try and do something difficult. Note that “relentless,” an adjective meaning to continue without rest, is used here as a noun.

What do you expect from the guy who stole a crippled kid’s bicycle?

If a person is “crippled,” they are physically disabled or handicapped (This word is generally considered old fashioned).

2, 4, 6, 8 minutes late. Next thing you know, we’re the US mail.

This is Chuck’s way of saying that if they don’t do better, Fed Ex will be as inefficient as the U.S. Mail service.

Those Ruskies would be walking on water right now.

A silly and old-fashioned way of referring to Russians.

It’s a 1992 full-bodied grape juice.

“Full-bodied” is a fancy way of referring to the taste of good wine, but it is never used for juice, unless the person is not being serious.

See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.

An expression that can be used to refer to people who refuse to see horrible things happening around them, thus making it easier for abusive governments to repress their people.

She went to the doctor. It wasn’t metastasized.

A medical word that refers to cancer that has spread to different parts of the body.

It’s just kind of wait and see.

If a person has a “wait and see” attitude, they have decided not to take any more action until they see what happens in the future.

I’m going to come by and see her on my next layover.

“To come by” a person’s house is to visit. A “layover” is usually a city airport where a plane lands before going on to the final destination.

He’s a systems analyst. He played centerfield for us in the softball tournament last labor day.

A “systems analyst” is a person who works with computer networks. “Centerfield” is a position in baseball (and softball), and a “tournament” is a series of games to see who has the best team. “Labor Day” is an American holiday held to celebrate workers.

That’s beside the point.

If something you say is “beside the point,” it is not

relevant to the main part of the conversation.

***Chuck returns to Kelly, but is soon off again on another quick trip.***

Is Kelly Frears around? :: She's copying her dissertation.

A "dissertation" is a major research paper that is written in order to get the graduate degree of Ph.D.

You're home. :: Home, indeed.

A British word that means certainly, without question or for sure.

He's been declared physically fit to fly; Santa got checked out by doctors at the VA hospital

If a person is "fit" to do something, they are physically able to do it. "To check out" a person is to carefully examine them. A "VA" hospital is run by the Veterans Administration, which serves people who served in the military.

After they declared the jolly old elf in tip top shape, Santa took off into the wild blue yonder.

"Jolly" is an old fashioned word for very happy, and an elf is a mythical children's character, like Santa Claus. If a person is in "tip top shape," they are in excellent physical health. "The wild blue yonder" is a literary way of referring to a place in the distance that is very far away.

You've got to be in the market for some of those candied hams.

If you are "in the market" for something, you want to buy it. "Candied hams" are a type of sugar-covered sweet ham that is popular for holidays

When I was there we did 2,000,000 and we thought that was a big deal. The glory days.

If something is "a big deal," it is considered important or impressive. A Person's "glory days" are those days in the past when they were at their best or most impressive.

And Fred Smith had that cardtable bronzed.

"To bronze" a piece of furniture is to cover it with a shiny brown coating that will make it last a very long time (Fred Smith is the founder and head corporate officer of the Fed Ex company).

The new hub in Anchorage.

A "hub" is an airport that an airline uses as a center of its operations, from which it flies to lots of other cities (Anchorage is the biggest city in the state of Alaska).

It's state of the art and a perfect marriage

between technology and systems management.

If something is “state of the art,” it is made with the very latest and best technology. “Systems management” is the science of managing networks made of either people or computer technologies.

Why don't you make an honest woman out of Kelly?

This is a silly way of asking Chuck to marry Kelly.

Kelly is still recovering from that failed relationship with that parolee.

A “parolee” is a person who was in prison but has been released “on parole,” which means they can stay free so long as they agree to certain conditions, such as reporting to a parole officer once a week.

I knew it had something to do with swearing to tell the truth.

In a court of law, a person “swears to tell the truth,” which is a dramatic way of saying that they promise to tell the truth.

He tripped on a curb holding the door open for me.

A “curb” is the edge of a sidewalk, where it meets the street.

Kelly just can't see being with a man who wears a pager to bed.

A pager is a small electronic device that people wear on their belts that allows them to know when somebody wants to talk to them (They are no longer as important since cell phones are now so common).

When you wear it to bed, I hope you get one of those things that go vibrating. :: I'm not touching that.

“To vibrate” is to shake gently back and forth. Here. “I'm not touching that” is a slangy way of saying “I refuse to talk about it.”

When are you defending your dissertation?

Note that a student “defends” their Ph.D. dissertation in an official ceremony in which professors ask them questions on what they have written.

Merry Christmas! :: I thought you were going to stiff her.

“To stiff” a person is a slangy way of saying to cheat them out of money, or perhaps to refuse to give them something they deserve.

Is it a test fishing line or something?

A “test” product is one that is used just to see if the product works like it is supposed to. A “fishing line” is used to catch fish.

I love the wrapping.

“Wrapping” is the paper that covers a box.

This is terrific. :: My granddaddy used it on the Southern Pacific.

“Terrific” is a good alternative word to excellent or fantastic. The “Southern Pacific” is the name of a major railroad that crosses the US.

You can program it so it vibrates.

“To program” a watch, computer or other machine is to set it up in such a way that it does what you want.

Sorry about the hand towels. You’re hard to shop for.

If a person is “hard to shop for,” it’s difficult to know what kind of present you should get them because it’s not clear what they would want (or perhaps what you know they want is difficult to find).

Take it and hold on to it so that you can open it on New Year’s Eve.

“To hold on to” something is to keep it indefinitely.

Is all this turbulence from Santa and those 8 tiny reindeer?

“Turbulence” is the violent shaking that planes sometimes experience when flying. “Tiny” means very small, and a “reindeer” is a type of deer that people associate with Santa Claus.

Tell them we’re deviating South for weather.

“To deviate” from a planned route is to move in another direction.

I got us plotted; We’re 200 miles South of our original course.

“To plot” a plane on a map is to locate exactly where it is.

A plane’s “course” is the planned direction it is supposed to take.

Continue plotting and check contingency procedures.

“Contingency procedures” are back-up plans that are taken if the original plan can no longer work because of a change in the situation.

Broadcasting in the blind; How do you read?

If a pilot is “broadcasting in the blind,” he is making radio contact without being able to see anything outside the plane. “How do you read?” is a pilot’s way of asking “What do you think?”

I’ve never been out of comm this long.

A pilot’s slangy way of saying communication.

Buckle up, Chuck. It’s gonna get bumpy.

“To buckle up” is another way of saying to put on a seat belt.

If a flight is “bumpy,” there is a lot of shaking, or turbulence.

We may have to ditch! Mayday, mayday!

“To ditch” a plane is to jump out and abandon it. “Mayday” is an official way of screaming for help in an emergency.

Chuck, life vest!

A “life vest” is a type of padded shirt that people wear in order to be able to float on the water after a ship sinks or plane crashes.

Brace for impact!

“To brace oneself” is to physically or emotionally prepare for something horrible, in this case a plane crash (the “impact” refers to the moment that the plane crashes into the water).

***Chuck becomes a castaway, alone with Mr. Wilson...***

Over here! SOS, please!

The letters “SOS,” when written out, are the international way of asking for help (Some people say it means “save our souls”).

Come on, come on!

The most versatile phrasal verb in English, in this case used simply to mean “please.”

The time to hesitate is through, come on baby, light my fire!

“To hesitate” is to wait or pause before taking action (These words are from the song “Light my Fire,” by the 1960s rock group The Doors).

Meteor shower! It’s a signal fire!

A “meteor shower” is a shower of bright lights in the sky caused by falling bits of rock, perhaps from a comet. A “signal fire” is Chuck’s word for the same thing, though this is never used.

You gotta love crab; Just in the nick of time.

Note that “have got to”----> “gotta” in rapid speech. “Just in the nick of time” is a colloquial way of saying “just in time.”

Coconut is a natural laxative, too.

A “laxative” is a food that causes a person to often go to the bathroom.

Things that Gilligan never told us.

This is a reference to the 1960s TV show “Gilligans’ Island,” which was about seven people who were stuck on a deserted island.

400 miles squared. That’s 160,000 square miles times pi.

Two math terms: A number “squared” is that number multiplied by itself. “Pi” is the famous number that refers to the number of times that the radius of a circle will go around the diameter of a circle (3.14...).

This tooth is just killing me.

If something is “killing you,” it is hurting you very much.

And just think, I used to avoid going to the dentist like the plague.

The “plague” is the black death that killed millions in Europe in the 1300s (People who really want to avoid doing something try to “avoid it like the plague”).

I **put off** every chance I got...now, what I wouldn't give to have a dentist in this cave.

“To put off” something is to postpone it, or decide to do it later.

“What I wouldn't give” is a stylistic way of saying “I would give anything if I could...”

You want to hear something funny? Back home in Memphis, my dentist's name is Dr. James Spalding.

Chuck is talking to Wilson the volleyball, and he's noting that his dentist is named Spalding; The two biggest American sport and ball manufacturers are the Wilson and Spalding companies.

Bakersfield!

A small city in central California.

44 lashings.

A rarely used word for a knot or rope or anything used to tie.

We're going to have to make a hell of a lot of rope.

A colloquial expression that adds emphasis or emotion.

March and April are our best chances for the high tides and ocean breezes.

“High tides” are those times at the beach when the water has risen up deep into the sands (which would make it easier to sail away).

We need 425 feet of good rope plus another 50 feet for miscellaneous.

A key word that means various or diverse things.

Round it off to 475 feet of good rope.

“To round off” a number is to estimate to the nearest big number (i.e....498 is usually rounded off to 500).

We're going to be short.

“We're not going to have enough.”

Do you have to keep bringing that up? Can't we just forget it?

“To bring up” something in a conversation is to start to talk about it.

You were right...it wasn't going to be a quick little snap.

A “quick little snap” is a slangy way of referring to something that is very easy to do (A ‘snap’ is a brief and sudden sound, such as the type that is made when you forcefully close a book).

It was the only option I had at the time.

A good word for a choice or possibility.

What's your point?

“What are you trying to say?”

We might just make it! Did that thought ever cross your brain?

In this case, “to make it” means to survive or succeed.

Regardless, I would rather take my chances out there on the ocean than to stay here and die on this shithole island.

A rarely used but interesting slang word for a small and horrible place.

Never again!

A common expression that is used to express the desire that something terrible that was done in the past can be allowed to happen again.

I'll do all the paddling! You just hang on!

“To paddle” a boat is to move it forward while using oars (wooden sticks) to push it through the water.

*After four long years, Chuck starts a new life.*

Dr. Pepper.

A popular soft drink.

Here's the drill. The plane pulls in, we get off.

“The drill” is a slangy way of referring to a precise plan of action that everybody involved should know very well.

There's a ceremony right there in the hanger.

A “ceremony” is an official or formal set of public acts or procedures, in this case to honor Chuck. A “hanger” is a very big building in which airplanes are parked so they can be repaired.

What in the world am I going to say to her?

A curious filler expression added to WH questions to show emotion such as excitement, surprise or fear.

We had a funeral, a coffin and a gravestone.

A “coffin” is the box that human bodies are buried in, and a “gravestone” is the stone with writing carved on it that is placed in a cemetery where a person is buried.

A cell phone, a beeper.

A device, like a pager, that lets people know when others want to talk to them.

That was a terrible and tragic day.

A powerful adjective that refers to something

horrible that causes great pain or suffering.

I actually did root canal on you about 5 years ago.

A dental procedure in which dentists operate below the teeth.

Kelly, she's had it rough. She's...sort of lost.

If a person has "had it rough," they have had a difficult life  
(And thus in this case, she is emotionally lost or confused).

I have to brief this man in his meetings  
tomorrow with the accountants and attorneys.

"To brief" a person is to tell them the most important facts (It is often  
done before the person has a meeting or is going to give a speech).

If you need anything, just sign for it.

This is a way of saying "You sign the bill and we'll pay for it."

It takes a lot of paperwork to bring back a man.

"Paperwork" refers to official papers and forms that are usually produced  
and filled out in an office. In this case, "to bring back a man" means to  
officially declare them alive, after having been declared dead.

***Chuck and Kelly face the passage of time....***

It's a nice house. :: We got a nice mortgage, too.

A "mortgage" is the monthly payment that people make to the bank  
in order to pay off the money they borrowed to buy their house.  
The second sentence is Kelly's way of saying their mortgage is a lot.

She's a beautiful little girl. :: She's a handful.

If a child is "a handful," it's a lot of work to take care of.

Let's get one thing straight here; We have a  
Pro Football team now, but they're in Nashville?

"Let's get one thing straight" is a way of saying  
that "we need to talk directly and honestly."

The Houston Oilers are the Tennessee Titans?

This refers to the fact that Houston's Professional Football team moved to  
Tennessee and then changed their names (Houston is known for oil  
companies, and "titans" are very powerful rulers or businessmen).

They went to the Super Bowl last year!

The "Super Bowl" is the championship game in American  
football and the most watched sporting event in the United States.

They almost won by one yard! One lousy yard!

"Lousy" is a good word that means of poor quality, or in this

case, insignificant or stupid. A “yard” is a distance of three feet.

I got whole milk, 2% and non-fat. I don't have half and half.

Milk can be whole (3% fat), 2% fat, 1% fat, or non-fat.

“Half and half” is half milk and half cream (and very fattening!)

That will do fine.

One way of saying “that’s good.”

What happened to you becoming a professor? ::

You're not Dr. Kelly Frears-Lovett?

Note that when a person gets a Ph.D. degree, they are given the honorary title of Dr., though this is rarely used in practice.

When your plane went down, everything just sort of got put on hold.

“To put a plan on hold” is to delay doing it until the situation becomes clearer or easier to deal with.

I think about taking it up again.

“To take up” a plan is to begin to do it.

I kept the picture. It was all faded.

If a photograph is “faded,” it has lost its color and newness, and looks degraded or old.

That's a family heirloom and it should stay in your family.

A “family heirloom” is a small object, such as a watch or ring, that has been passed down from one generation to the next.

They said they never figured out what caused the crash.

“To figure out” a mystery or question is to solve or understand it.

Probably some misabeled hazardous material caught fire.

If some product is “misabeled,” it is wrapped in packaging that says it is something that it is not. If a material is “hazardous,” it is dangerous.

You drifted about 500 miles; This is where your island was, about 600 miles South of the Cook Islands.

“To drift” on the water is to slowly float away, but with no particular direction.

And there are the search grids.

A “grid” is a map with many squares drawn on it that allow you to quickly identify where something is.

You kept our car; All right, now this is weird.

An excellent word that means strange or bizarre.

Let me get some **stuff** out of the back.

A critical word that generally means “things,” though note that this can refer to anything from physical objects to emotions.

You’re the love of my life.

A very romantic and poetic way of telling a person that they are the most important person they have ever been with, or ever will be with.

Everyone said I had to **let you go**.

In this case, to “let go” of a person is to emotionally accept that they can no longer be a part of your life.

***Chuck prepares for an uncertain future....***

We did the math. Kelly **added it all up**.

In this case, to “add up the numbers” is to see what the odds or chances of something happening are.

I was going to get sick or **injured** or something.

If a person is “injured,” they have been physically hurt, often in an accident.

I made a rope and went up to the **summit** to **hang myself**.

The “summit” of a mountain is its highest point. “To hang oneself” is a common form of suicide in which the person puts a rope around their neck after hanging it from a tree or the ceiling.

The weight of the **log** **snapped** the **limb** of the tree.

A “log” is a thick piece of wood. If something “snaps,” it suddenly breaks into two pieces. The “limb” of a tree refers to its branches. This is Chuck’s way of explaining why he was not able to hang himself.

All my **logic** said I would never see this place again.

“Logic” is reason or rational thought. Chuck is explaining how he thought he would probably die on the island.

The **tide** came in and gave me a **sail**.

The “tide” is the rise and fall of the water over time as it hits the beach. A “sail” is a piece of cloth or material placed on a boat that allows it to be moved forward by the wind.

I’m so sad that I don’t have Kelly, but I’m so **grateful** that she was with me on that island.

“Grateful” is a good alternative to appreciative. This is Chuck’s way of saying that it was the memory of Kelly that motivated him to keep alive on the island.

Tomorrow the sun will rise; Who knows what the tide could bring?  
Chuck's way of saying that nobody  
knows what will happen in the future.

"Return to Sender, Address unknown."  
The words of a famous Elvis Presley song.

You look lost...where are you headed?  
If a person is "headed," somewhere, that is where they plan to go.

I was just about to figure that out.  
"To figure out" a question is to find the answer or solution to it.

This road here will hook you up with  
the I-40 East. Amarillo, Flagstaff...California.  
If a road "hooks up" with another, it is connected to it, or leads into it.  
"I-40" is a short way of referring to an Interstate Highway (#40). Amarillo  
is a town in Texas, and Flagstaff is a town in Arizona.

You'll find a whole lot of nothing all the way to Canada.  
A poetic way of saying "nothing."

# **Cast Away**

## **Possible Topics for ESL Class Discussion**

1) If you found yourself like Chuck, suddenly alone on that island, would you try to kill yourself? If so, after how long?

2) What would be harder?---The physical challenge of getting enough food and water, or the emotional challenge of being constantly alone?

3) What would you have done if you were in Kelly's situation at the end of the movie?

4) What would be the hardest part about being out of touch with society?

5) What did you like and not like about this movie?