

I wasn't cold, but I was shivering when I walked onto the Clayton Road overpass. I wasn't scared either, even when I climbed over the rail. I didn't really feel much of anything.

It was late at night and it was quiet. No cars went past.

I looked at the road below. It was a long way down. I focused on the spot where I would probably land, between the white line and the brown gravel. I wondered if it would hurt or if I would die straight away. Then I wondered who would find me. Maybe it would be a truck driver or a shift worker. I felt bad for them.

I must have been thinking about things for a while, because when I looked across to my right, I saw a man down the other end of the overpass.

He was smoking a cigarette. I could see the orange end glowing in the dark. I got nervous. He was probably walking his dog or something. I didn't want him to come closer. I closed

my eyes and let go of the rail, but then I realised it would be awful if he saw me do it. I decided to wait.

I looked back at the man from under my hoodie and I noticed something that I hadn't seen at first. He was on the other side of the rail too.

I wasn't sure what to do. I knew I should call out or say something, but I didn't have the courage. He ashed his cigarette and flicked it. I watched it spin in the air and hit the road below.

When I looked back up, the man was staring at me. I turned away. I felt like I had been caught out.

I heard his footsteps walking towards me. He didn't rush. I shuffled across and kept my head down. I thought about

falling then and there, but my mind got really crowded and I froze.

I flinched when I heard his voice.

'I'm not here to talk you out of it.'

I was still looking down.

'Don't come any closer,' I said.

'Righto.'

I guessed he was a couple of metres away.

'Just stay there.'

'I understand.'

He was calm. I sneaked a look at him. He was old. He had a short grey beard and he wore a dark wool jumper and grey pants. He leaned on the rail and looked down at the road. He didn't say anything else.

I edged further away from him. He didn't move, but it felt like he was following me. I couldn't stop shaking. My teeth were clacking together. My head was still throbbing from before, and there was a high-pitched ringing sound in my ears. I felt so panicked and dizzy that my mind floated outside my body, and I could see myself from above. Everything went still and nothing mattered. It was peaceful and silent up there. I watched myself lean forwards.

And that's when I dropped.

For a moment I had no weight, then suddenly I stopped. The man had caught me by the arm. I wriggled and kicked and pulled.

'*Don't!* Let me go! Let me *go!* Don't! Let me go!'

I tried to tear his fingers off me, but his grip was too strong.

Then I looked down and it all felt real and I got scared.

I stopped fighting and I held on.

'Don't let me go! *Don't let me go!*'

The man grunted and lifted me over the rail. He wrapped his arms tightly around me.

'It's alright, it's alright. I got you.'

He started coughing badly, still holding me. He couldn't get any air in. He let go and bent over and wheezed. I rubbed his back, but he waved me away.

Finally, he stopped. He straightened and spat over the edge. Then he put his hand on my shoulder, and we sat down together with our backs against the rail.

'I'm Sam,' I said.

'Vic.'

We were quiet for a while.

'How come you're up here?' I asked.

Vic didn't answer.

'I mean, why were *you* going to do it?'

He sighed.

'The dog died.'

I thought about it.

'You must have really loved your dog.'

He shook his head.

'I hated the little prick.'

That confused me.

'What kind of dog was it?'

'Small and loud.'

'Did you leave a note?'

He shook his head.

'How come?' I asked.

He shrugged.

It went quiet again. Then Vic slowly got to his feet, using the rail for support.

'Well, mate, I don't think it's our night, do you?'

Vic held out his hand but I didn't take it. He looked at me closely. He must have thought I looked strange, with all the make-up and the blood on my face and my patchy hair, but he didn't show it. He just looked tired. I pulled my hood back over.

'Come on,' he said.

I didn't want to go. I shook my head. Vic leaned down and gently pulled me to my feet.

'You spoiled my last smoke,' he said. 'So we're even.'