

The Man on the Train

Yesterday I met a man on a train who told me that, two months ago, his only daughter had taken the elevator up to the top of a tall building in Japan. And jumped off ... I listened to his regrets, to his hurts, and my only regret at the time was that I hadn't managed it myself.

I *had* tried. My very hardest. I'd even written a note. Not that anyone would find it. The only person that ever knocked on the door of my dingy, dull little flat was the rent collector. And even he never set more than a few steps inside ... only to decide whether the odd, unsanitary stench — as he called it — was me, or it. Not that it would have mattered much whether it was found or not — it's not like I've anyone to miss me. In fact, I don't think anyone would even realise I was gone. If I *had* succeeded ... if my breeches hadn't caught on the blasted metal handrails and I'd actually plunged from the high rooftops of the London flats, maybe then someone would've noticed me, my mangled corpse delicately sprawled upon the pavement — or would they simply walk over me?

But I couldn't even do that right, and once again became a laughing stock. For the people who found me, for the people who they called for help and then for the people who were called by them, 'just for a bloody laugh'. Perfect. My life on a whole — bloody perfect. It had always been that way. Ever since I would write my name. For me, it started with name-calling and never ended. I now have an unforgiving hatred towards my parents. The ones who brought me into this world; the ones who raised me for the first ten years of my life; the ones who named me and the ones who left, as soon as it got hard. As soon as the money trees stopped growing and the bank stopped loaning, they ran. And I was left on the front doorstep of an orphanage, with only a note and the clothes I wore. Scared, confused and completely and utterly alone.

I was fed up. Fed up with failing. Fed up with the deep nauseating feeling of regret. I would do it. I wasn't going to fail this time; I wasn't going to return home swimming in shame and self pity; I would end it — finally. A long dull road it may have been but finally the end had come. Suppressing a quiver of the lips, which many called a 'smile' — the word tasted peculiar on my tongue — I gathered my things with a little more haste than I anticipated and a lot more than I had memory of ever using before.

What I needed didn't take long to gather: I'd dedicated an entire drawer to them. My knife. Lying on the very top, only small, broken off from some overly used penknife many years ago, but very precious to me. Not that I could honestly say it had been used on anything other than old cheese packets — but it still looked impressive and is somewhat reassuring to have. The rope. Again, never been used...yet. And, finally: the pills. A small clear glass bottle, long rid of its label with an equally small lid, containing a surprisingly large number of minute yellow pills, was lodged at the very back of my drawer — in shame. They, unlike the knife, had been used before, to my humiliation. I'd trusted them to help me, help me cross over the bridge into death; but they'd deceived me. It was only later when my stomach had finally decided it had punished me enough, and allowed me to stop running to the bathroom every two minutes, I really scrutinised the small print on the bottom, only to find out to my

horror that they were in fact a vitamin supplement! Some other objects nestled in there, too, but I'd already made my decision.

Walking through the back streets, I felt an odd motion in my stomach, leaving my legs and arms tingling and me feeling sufficiently ill. However, it did nothing to slow my pace or my mind. Now the decision had been made it seemed a large weight had been lifted. Even though I'd made such a decision on many occasions before, for the first time, it felt real. Perhaps I'd purposely sabotaged my earlier attempts: a subconscious way of telling me I wasn't ready? Perhaps. Then, again, perhaps not.

The streets seemed to be whizzing by almost as if I were in a train or some other vehicle, watching myself through a window of time. Floating above my body, I seemed to shadow my physical self. Every movement seemed so distant, my body numb to the thudding of my feet as they collided with the cold paving. It didn't take long to arrive where I wanted to be. The woods were quiet, so quiet, but not in an eerie way.

A strange tranquillity followed me as I walked in, deeper and deeper. I craned my head upwards, searching for a suitable branch. The rope had already somehow found its way from my knapsack into my hands, now sweating with the tight grip they'd taken. That momentary lapse in search of a good branch allowed me to catch a glimpse of something black and shiny in the undergrowth. Bending closer, it became obvious it was a man's shoe. My stomach tightened. I had a good idea what I'd find next. Looking up, eyes slowly following the line of the nearest tree trunk, sure enough, I was not mistaken.

I dropped the rope. Hanging there, limply — the man on the train.