

Not one gray cloud or teardrop from the heavens tries to stop me from what I am about to do. The sky is blue and mocking. Not even the sky cares about my pain. No one does. No one will miss me when I'm gone.

Don't jump, I think, looking down.

I swing one leg over the side of the bridge, and then the other. The rushing currents will sweep my troubles away once and for all. I hold on to the metal railing, leaning as far as I can over the edge.

Shhhh, shhhh. The shushing sound of the river calls me. Beneath the smooth surface is a treacherous, inescapable swirling current. My troubles will end as soon as I let go.

Don't jump!

I let go of the railing, allowing myself to fall forward, toward the waters fifty feet below. The thrill of the wind knocks my breath away. But as the waters draw near I cannot help myself.

I cannot contain my fear.

*I jump.*

I stare at my hands. So strange, how I feel solid, yet appear as a translucent and ghostly figure. I suppose I'll never get used to jumping.

I glance at my surroundings. I'm on a rocky river bank, the water lapping and splashing the hem of my jeans, but I cannot feel and it doesn't get me wet. I glance at my watch. The numbers flash between 12:01 and 12:21 PM.

Twenty minutes. It's been twenty minutes since I jumped off the bridge. And somewhere in these waters is my dead body.

I hear a splash and I crouch. I'm not sure why; it's not as if anyone can see me when I'm in this form.

"What's *he* doing here?" I mutter.

Zachary Adair, a boy in my school, wades into the water.

"Julie!" he calls, grabbing something in the water.

He wraps his arms around my waterlogged body and hauls it to shore.

Why?

Why didn't he just back off and let the current sweep my body away?

I stumble backwards as he lays me on the dry ground. Light brown hair is plastered to my wet face. My eyelids are closed, and the life has faded from my cheeks. It could almost appear as if I was sleeping. The peacefulness of finally being at rest is inviting.

Zach places his hands over my sternum and pushes down quick.

CPR—I remember the maneuver well. I also know that his attempts are futile. He should know by now—after all those weeks pining over a book in Lit and putting on the high school play—that the story of Romeo and Juliet ends in tragedy. Why should it be any different for Juliette Mannings?

And he wouldn't understand. Nobody seemed to understand. They just mocked. They mocked as I gazed off into space. They said, "*Look at Julie! Jumping into the future, Julie?*" They laughed and mocked at my stories. They didn't believe me. Even with my impossibly perfect test scores and accidental disappearances, they didn't believe.

What's the worth of an orphaned freak that nobody, not even my own foster parents, cares about? I've asked myself that question a million times. And I always come to the same conclusion.

There is no worth. If nobody cares, nobody will notice. If nobody notices, then what's the point of life?

And that is what brought me to the bridge.

So why does Zach weep over me now?

"Go away!" I scream.

He can't hear me. Now I'm just a phantom watching my future unfold.

The idea of this seems impossible. I didn't believe the ability myself when it first occurred. But now I cannot deny the reality of what I see with my own eyes. However, what I believe doesn't matter because nobody else believes in my ability.

Look at him, sobbing for me. As if he has lost someone he loves. On his knees, wasting his energy attempting to bring me back. But I don't want to come back. I chose this. I chose death.

Still, his anguish brings me to my knees.

"Don't cry," I whisper to myself. Don't cry. Let him hurt. Give him a glimpse of the reality I've faced for all these years, since I lost my parents. Don't cry. Go back, jump back in

time and fall into the water and let all troubles be swept away. Let Juliette die. It's what she desires.

I flash back to the accident four years ago.

The crash still haunts me.

Twelve-year-old me sat in the back seat of my dad's old, beat up Honda Civic. My parents chatted and I sat quietly, watching the world pass us by. The snow-plows had gone through the streets, creating those hideous mounds of plowed snow that lined the curb. I remember how much it bothered me. We only get a handful of snow days a year, so why mess up the beauty of a blanket of pure, untouched perfection?

The last orange beams of sunset sink behind the horizon, making the outside world dark, and I can only see my reflection in the window.

And then, suddenly I'm not in the car.

I'm outside, standing on a snow mound.

I look around frantically, my body suddenly pale and translucent. My coat is in the car so I expect cold, but I'm not cold. I'm surprisingly comfortable.

I'm not cold, and that scares me.

My dad's car passes me, and I scream. Have they kicked me out?

Upon a further look I see another little girl in the car. She wears a hot pink sweater like mine, and purple jeans like me. Her light brunette tresses are pigtail-braided, like mine.

But how can this imposter be me, when I'm standing right here at the side of the road?

"Mom! Dad!" I scream at the top of my lungs.

They don't hear; they just continue down the highway. I run after them, careful to stay on the median and not stumble into the street, waving my arms back and forth. Tears start streaming. A flurry of snow blows onto me, but it doesn't settle on my clothes and my hair like it should. The crystal flakes float through me.

I don't want to be like this anymore. I want to be with my parents.

I stop as the car hits a patch of ice. The wheels screech and spin off course. Eyes wide, I watch as the car flips over. Once, twice, again it flips, and then slams over the guard rail, tumbling down a small ditch.

"No!" I scream.

I fall to my knees and sob, afraid to go look at the wreckage, afraid of what I may find.

“Please don’t be dead,” I whisper.

The color starts returning to my hands, and I stare at them. I watch as my hands and arms and body regain solid form, and then I stare at the girl in the wreckage who looks like me, and she fades.

I hear sirens in the distance, but I’m too scared to move. Soon, I would be found and questioned. And I would tell the truth of all I had seen that night, all that had happened to me. But nobody ever believed me.

My thoughts return to the river shore as I hear Zach speak, his eyes darting. Searching—  
“Julie? Did you jump? Are you watching? Are you here? Please! Don’t be dead!”

I stagger back, and say in a voice he cannot hear, “But, but nobody ever believed me, you least of all.”

He had been Romeo that year in the school play. Angela Stevens—cast as Juliet this year, was out sick. The play was coming up quickly, and if anyone knew the lines well enough, they could be cast as the understudy Juliet. So, naturally I volunteered.

“Julie Mannings,” the director says. “You will be trying out for the understudy role of Juliet, in place of Angela. Please get up there on the stage.”

I plop my script down on my seat and climb the short steps to the stage. I know the lines well enough already, just from all the reading and analysis in Lit class. I stand across from Zachary, who flashes a smile that makes my heart do a summersault into my stomach.

He starts reciting his lines, fluidly and smooth and carefree. His voice carries me to other worlds, and suddenly I panic.

Would I make a fool of myself in front of him? Would I mess up and make him look bad? Would I do well and get the part of my dreams?

I have to know, so I jump.

Instantly I find myself backstage, behind the curtain, unable to hear the talking.

I try navigating my phantom through the mess of equipment and costume racks, and finally, frustrated, I just pass through the junk. It has a slight tingly sensation, and freaks me out a bit, but I have to reach Zach and see if I did all right! Time is already running out. My translucent form starts gaining solidity and, groaning in frustration, I focus on jumping back before anyone sees me become solid.

I blink, and find myself back on stage.

“Julie?” Zach asks me quietly. To him, I had probably been standing there blankly for who knows how long.

“Uh, huh?” I mutter, not sure what line to recite. I don’t even know what act we are on! Why didn’t I bring my script? This was not supposed to happen.

“Director?” calls one of the stagehands, Matt McCollins. “Director, Zach shouldn’t practice with Julie. She’s obviously got other things on her mind.”

The director nods. “Juliette, either say your line or get down. Marcie can fill in.”

“I...um. Where were we?”

“Oh, just get down there, you good for nothing space cadet,” Matt hisses low enough that the director can’t hear.

Zach just scowls a piercing scowl that deflates my hopes and my joy. He doesn’t say a word, but his look tells me to go away.

So I go.

I sprint down the stairs and down the hall and away from the auditorium. I hear girls whispering about me as I pass. I command myself not to cry. Nobody will know about this except the people in the auditorium.

So I thought, until a video went up on Facebook. It shows Zach’s beautiful performance, and then him looking towards me, waiting for my response. I stared at him, dumbfound and dreamily for a good 20 seconds before he tried to prod me, and I let out a dazed, “Uh, huh?”

Of course, everyone thought I was just goggling over a crush and soon the whole school knew about my little flub. I could no longer be within a hundred feet of Zach without humiliating us both. And my foster parents were no consolation. Why should they care for my wellbeing?

“It’s what you get for being on the Internet,” they’d sneer. As if they’d care if I was hurting. They were only in it for the money for raising me. As long as I didn’t bother them, they treated me fair.

At school I was mocked. At home I was invisible. There was nowhere to run. And the one person I ever crushed on hated me. I would never forget that scowl.

So now why does Zach say he believes me?

“Too late, Zachary Adair,” I say.

I stare at my hands that are starting to become solid. I close my eyes, focusing on jumping back. I will then fall into the waters and be swept away from this miserable existence.

As I concentrate and blink, I see Zach lean over my lifeless body and kiss my lips.

And just like that, the scene of him and my dead counterpart in his arms vanish, the wind rushing past me as I jump back through time.

For a moment, I am frozen in time, posed motionless over the water no more than ten feet below now in the exact position I was in when I had first jumped.

The moment ends, and I'm airborne, tumbling through the air towards rushing river. The water slaps my legs, followed by my stomach in a painful belly-flop that knocks my breath away. My vision blackens as the currents pull me under. I am weightless and tumbling through swirling waters.

This is the end, I think to myself. This is how I die.

When I was seven, I was terrified of dying. I asked my mom if she had ever been close to death. She brushed a strand of her dark blonde hair behind her ear and smiled at me sympathetically.

"Yes, Julie. Once," she says as her smile fades. "I was about three, and I fell off a dock. The water wasn't deep, but I didn't know a thing about swimming."

"Were you scared?" I ask.

"I was confused. The memory is vague, but I remember sucking in the water, and it filled my lungs. But I wasn't scared. I was suspended in the water, I didn't sink, and a feeling of relaxation overtook me as my vision started to fade. I could practically hear angels singing."

"What happened?" I ask, enthralled.

"I was rescued and revived. And I was always more careful around water after that."

Of late, I would revisit that memory. When my parents first died I tried not to think about them, or else I would have a breakdown. But after four years, I began to cherish every memory so I would never forget. And in the past couple months that one brought clarity to the bridge. If there was a way I could die relaxed, without pain, then that is what I choose.

Now my decision seems naïve.

I want air, my lungs cry for it as the currents overtake me. I spiral out of control with nothing to anchor me. I don't know which way is up and which way is down.

I slam into rocks at the bottom of the river, and a searing pain races up my spine. I know I can only survive a few moments longer, and soon the pain will be gone. All of the pain, from all these years will be gone.

But I can only think of him. Why would Zachary kiss me?

Because he cares for me.

But nobody, nobody in my life cares. I could disappear off the face of the planet and nobody would even notice.

Yet, maybe he would. He came after me. He must've seen me come to the bridge, and he tried to save me. Why bother if he didn't care?

The thoughts confused me, and darkness was creeping into my vision.

Was he the only one who cared?

What about my foster parents? Would they blame themselves for my death?

And my parents! If they had known I would do this—that I would jump off the bridge—would they have been ashamed? Would they have been heartbroken? Are they watching me from heaven?

I need to just let go of my insecurities and face whatever comes next. The pain is excruciating. I want it to end.

But, do I *really* want to die? Is my life *truly* so bad as to make those who love me suffer loss? Is it worth it?

Every aching bone of my body screams at me. My vision narrows, my lungs ache. I can feel myself losing consciousness. I focus on one, final thought.

If there is such a thing as a God above, please save me! I don't want to die, not anymore. I will give you my life if you let me live.

“Please! Don't be dead!”

Zachary. That's Zach's voice. Distant, yet strangely close.

My chest hurts. I cough, water pouring out of my mouth. I turn on my stomach and gag. Sand, stones, dry ground—I'm no longer underwater. I turn towards Zach. His face is wet and his eyes red from crying.

I collapse on the ground, and he touches my shoulder lightly. “Julie? Are you all right?”

I nod weakly.

“Did you jump?”

His question had many possibilities. “You saw me, didn't you?”

“But you fought the river. Either you were in for a thrill ride or you just attempted suicide and you bailed. Why? You jumped, didn’t you?”

I nod again. “And you saved me. Just now, you saved my life. Why?”

He squeezes his eyes shut, breathing heavily. “I couldn’t let you die. I prayed, I *begged* God you’d live, Julie.”

“I don’t get you!” I mutter. “First you hate me and scowl at my presence, then you sob and...I just don’t get it!”

“Hate you? Scowl? Geez, that scowl was never directed at you, but at my so-called friends standing behind you making fun! I would never hurt you like that!”

I sob, and to my surprise he embraces me. “Never Julie. I’ll never hurt you.”

I regain my composure, as I realize something. I stare at him, looking into his deep gray eyes.

“Do you believe in God?”

He looks at me, amazed. “Yes, I do. Why?”

I look up at the blue, beautiful sky. “Because I’ve got a promise to keep.”