

Bridge Jumping

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I stood at the edge staring down at what could become my own watery grave. I looked up from the glossy surface of the water to where my mother lay in her sunbathing chair, about 100 yards up river, trying to turn her fluorescent white legs tan. She was completely unaware of the impending doom her oldest daughter faced.

Suddenly a shadow cast over me, and I glanced over my shoulder to see my father standing tall behind me giving me a big toothy smile on his face.

“You gunna go soon or what?” He asked smiling at the wide look in my eyes.

“I’m mentally preparing myself,” I said.

Just then the rickety metal bridge we stood on gave the slightest shiver, and I turned around just in time to watch a slightly drunk man leap from the bridge supports 20 feet above. He flung himself out over the water and landed not too gracefully in the waters below on his back. When the man surfaced he cried out in pain. His white back was now red. He swore loudly as he climbed the river bank out of the water.

“Your turn!” my dad nudged me closer to the edge of the bridge. There was no way I would ever jump from the supports above. I wasn’t nuts, just looking for a thrill.

I took a deep breath and stepped under the metal railing. Now all that kept me from plunging 20 feet down into the merciless water was my iron grip on the railing behind me.

Don’t get me wrong I’m not scared of heights or anything. It’s just that all my life my parents had filled my head with stories of crazed people trying to show off on the river, and winding up hitting their heads on some rock or stump or something and dying. It was my mother’s favorite thing to caution me. Every time we swam near anything that looked mildly interesting in the river, she’d remind me that there were probably snakes or fallen trunks just under the water waiting for you to take a dive right on top of them and break your neck. That’s why she was in the chair facing the other way, unaware of what was going on, and my dad was the one cheering me on.

As I had stood, contemplating my own death, some of the drunk old men on shore had noticed me balking at the jump and decided to lend their support.

“Jump girly! Jump! You can’t walk off that bridge; it’s against the law of the land!” one yelled raising his beer can to me. I swallowed as several people looked up at me to stare. There was absolutely no turning back at this point.

I closed my eyes for a moment and let the words from one of my favorite songs float through my head: *“If you jump I will jump to. We will fall together, never looking back at what we’ve done...Leap the edge and flutter by. We’re finally alive.”* Then I smiled and took in a breath, ready now for the fall.

As I let my grip on the rail behind me go and took the crucial step, I opened my eyes and watched the world fall out from under me. It was amazing; the summer sun lit everything in the most beautiful way. The adrenaline in my veins pulled everything into sharp focus. As the wind whipped past my head, I watched as the trees all around seemed to grow at a rapid rate.

I felt so alive. This felt right, like me, like if any one had ever wondered what my soul looked like, they need only have watched that moment and felt what I felt to know who I was totally. I was free from everything for just a moment, flying through the air, like not even gravity held me in its grasp.

And then it was over. I hit the water and plunged fifteen feet, my feet grazing the bottom of the river before quickly kicking off to surface. When my head broke free of the water, I gulped the air the moment had stolen when I fell.

“What did you think?” my dad asked shaking water out of his face next to me in the water. He had jumped right next to me.

“It was great! Let’s go again!” I said with a smile that glowed so bright it might have made the sun jealous.