

## Jump

MaryAnn never guessed it would be like this. As she hung suspended in the air, she was not surprised to hear the voice whisper to her, "Did you think it would be over so quickly? Did you think it would be easy?"

Yes, she had certainly thought it would be over quickly. On the way to work each day as Mary Ann crossed the mile long bridge over the Hudson River, she considered how easy it would be to just stop and get out of her car, climb the railing and jump to her death in the river below. The day she saw the men working by the side of the road on the bridge she realized it would not be that simple. The top of the railing came to their chests and she probably could not easily climb over it and drop to her death. She absolutely did not want to fail at suicide, stopped by a railing she could not surmount because she was overweight. How embarrassing that would be, as dumb as it sounded. The voice would needle her relentlessly.

On that evening she made a desultory meal of greens and a thin slice of bread ... of dubious value to her diet because she knew later the urge for sugar would overwhelm her and result in a drive to the convenience store for a box of donuts. MaryAnn, a pretty young woman, although overweight, finished eating her meager supper and stood in the kitchen window looking out at her car. The front bumper jutted out enough for her to stand on, she thought, so she might use it as a step to the hood of the car. From there she could step on the windshield if she wore sneakers, and then up to the roof. If she parked close enough to the bridge's concrete curb, she could just hop right off the roof of the car over railing. A few seconds later she would hit the surface of the water like a 165 pound sack of potatoes and break into pieces. While she visualized her demise as she stood looking out at

her car, she felt better. Considering her death, she realized it wouldn't matter if she bought two boxes of donuts tonight. Tomorrow she could be gone for good. No more worries. No more problems, no more MaryAnn. No more voice to bother her.

She took her sneakers to work in the morning. She left the job on time that afternoon, putting on the footwear before closing up her desk and locking it. As she drove on to the bridge she realized she needed to go to the bathroom. But that wouldn't matter in less than five minutes.

On the bridge she pulled to the side of the road and purposely scraped her car against the railing to ensure she was as close as possible. Without hesitation, without stopping for even a breath or a thought, she put the car in Park, opened her door, walked ahead a few feet and turned to face the bumper.

Beyond her car, Mary Ann saw a pickup truck slow to a stop instead of pulling around her. She felt her face burn with embarrassment to have a witness. She sucked in her breath and began to run back toward her car, to jump behind the wheel and flee. At the last moment she changed her mind. Stepping on the front bumper she launched herself up to the roof where she turned quickly and jumped over the railing.

In pure fright MaryAnn's eyes opened the widest in her life and she could see the river below, the green lawns running down to the water's edge, the blue sky and the puffy white clouds of a gorgeous summer afternoon. She seemed to hang suspended above it all, as if God wanted her to realize what she was giving up.

"Did you think you could get away from me?" said the voice as MaryAnn hung over the river. "Take a trip to eternity without me? Fat chance! We're going to wait right here until I'm ready."

Eternity waited below while the voice lectured MaryAnn. But she wasn't listening. Her mind's eye saw the scene she'd just left behind, someone getting out of his car and looking toward her. Had he been a little earlier on the

scene, he might have caught up with MaryAnn and talked her down off the roof of her car. How MaryAnn wished the man had done so. For she no longer wanted to be dead. She wanted to live, but she was already over the railing and falling, although for some reason she was arrested in mid air and the whole world around her was unmoving as though a button had been pushed and the tape stopped. MaryAnn was not relieved. She was in the act of dying and she was terrified. She wanted the tape to start up again so that her death would soon be over. It was supposed to last only seconds, but at this rate it could go on forever. She could feel her heart beating at a speed she had never before experienced. Her head felt like it would explode with pressure. Her nipples signaled the freezing cold her body now felt and her bowels had already loosened, evidently in anticipation of their uselessness at the moment of death. And that mocking voice that had been with her since her mother's funeral got louder and louder.

"You can't do anything right!" it said.  
"Let me go, Mother!" her soul screamed.

"You're not going anywhere, Fancy Lady," the voice hissed. "You can't lose me. You're dead, you little bitch and I've got you now!"

MaryAnn fumed and her anger mixed with her terrific fear in an awful combination of hate. Her stomach threw its contents up into her throat, but a scream from deep within pushed everything out from her mouth at high speed, Lunch sprayed out over the river and as it descended to the water it looked like flames.

The world was moving again. Mary Ann was not. The man who had left his car and ran toward MaryAnn was now leaning over the railing. He must have crawled up on the roof of her car. MaryAnn saw the man wore a bright yellow hard hat and at that moment he threw a leg over the railing and jumped, landing next to her on the scaffolding.

"Don't move!" he shouted at MaryAnn while he dialed his cell phone.

Her blouse and underwear had somehow been pushed up to her neck and the man quickly pulled her shirt down to her waist. Soon a crew appeared above. They hauled her up like a sack of potatoes in a paint splattered tarp. The crew and ambulance technicians were quite nice to her. So was the man in the hard hat. That surprised her since he had risked his life to rescue a woman who had been so ready to throw her own away.

A psychiatrist was her first visitor at the hospital after she was settled in a room for the night. MaryAnn spoke with him for an hour. She had never met a psychiatrist before. He heard about all the troubles in her life. But she never mentioned the voice.

When the doctor left and closed the door, leaving her alone, MaryAnn felt the fear return.

"Almost, honey," said the voice of her mother when the room wound down to a deadly quiet. "We'll have to find another way to have you join me."

"I'm not coming with you, Mother," MaryAnn said to the wall in front of her.

"Of course you are, darling," said the voice. "Where did you think you were going when you jumped off the bridge ... to heaven?"

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[dave@windsweptpress.com](mailto:dave@windsweptpress.com)