

**The winning entry for SNAP  
Student New Angle Prize 2016**



**The Bridge**

by

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A bitterly cold November. Suspended over the Orwell.

I didn't come here to jump, simple circumstance placed me on the wrong side of the river, and I'm crossing the bridge to get home. Of course the notoriety of this place will lead most people to suspect the intentions of a lone pedestrian, especially one prepared to endure the sting of this winter wind. I admit that my precarious position – hunched head first over the wall – probably isn't dissuading anyone from assuming the worst. But I need to look, urged by a sort of morbid curiosity. Now I'm dizzy, and nauseous, yet transfixed by the deceptively calm, dark water – darker still in the long shadows of these monolithic columns. I feel the frozen concrete pressing uncomfortably on my belly. I listen to the steady rush of traffic behind, and the cry of a peregrine above – signs of life. Far below is the promise of something else.

Now I'm daydreaming about falling, my senses play into the vision. The cold parapet is the breathless cramp of plunging into icy water, the white noise of wind and traffic is the flooding of my aural canals, and the paralysing fear – the vertigo – is the slow deprivation of oxygen. I feel my limbs spasm and weaken. I'm wondering what it takes to push someone beyond this biological revulsion to the danger of death. A trauma might do it, a disquiet passion, or the smouldering tedium of the time between.

Suddenly a hand grabs my belt. Now there's true terror in the prospect of potentially falling. But I'm lifted – ungraciously wrestled – from the wall, landing sharply, yet safely on the path. There's a tall man standing over me, plainly dressed in boots, jeans, and jacket. He looks the strong and confident type, in his mid thirties, wiry and a little weathered. A look of consternation crosses his brow, and his deep blue eyes shine with a certain urgency, but it's not an altogether unfriendly expression. I sit silently considering how – on a bridge synonymous with suicide – he must mistake me for a jumper, and I'm embarrassed by burdening this man. He extends his hand to raise me to my feet, and I sheepishly accept. My left ankle fails in its function, and the good Samaritan supports me by the shoulder. Now with assisted limp the traversal of this stone behemoth resumes. The tall man doesn't speak, neither do I, perhaps the shock of the situation is cause enough to proceed in silence.

Then from somewhere in my muddled mind comes a question, formed from facts. The tall man is devoid of vehicle, like me he's on foot, braving the blasts and gales of exposure. Like me he knows the infamy of this location ... Did *he* come here to jump? I turn to ask, but met with a curious, compassionate, and disarming smile, I simply return the affable, unassuming countenance.

Now we're crossing the bridge together.

