

## Krill

He rounded the corner just as I was about to jump. He put down his guitar and leant against the railings, gazing out across London. When he caught me staring at him, he nodded a good-natured hello. 'Cheer up, mate. Might never happen,' he said in a jokey sort of way. Then he patted his pockets, asked, 'don't suppose you can spare us a smoke?' and made a flicking motion with a thumb.

I tossed him a packet of Rothmans and my Dunhill lighter. 'Keep them,' I said in such a way as to make clear that I wanted to be alone.

He raised an eyebrow and gave me a curious look. 'Giving up?' he asked and nodded slowly when I looked away. 'Thing is,' he said. 'Statistics prove ten out of ten bods who top thesselves die a premature death. But what do they know, eh? Eejits,' he scoffed. 'Fact is, one in every two jumpers bodge it and end up as cripples.'

I stared down towards eternity and gulped. I had assumed that jumping off Suicide Bridge would be a foolproof way to go - scramble up the railings, hold my breath, close my eyes and leap to freedom. Not for one moment had I considered failure and the lifelong agony that might bring.

In no apparent hurry, he continued to stare across London soaking up the view. After minutes that felt like hours, he turned to me and said, 'considered putting your head on the train lines? Never fails. Real messy, though.' He raised a finger, struck by a thought. 'I know,' he said. 'Hows about taking an overdose? No blood, see.' As I shrank back, his smile faded. 'Then again, you could try talking.' He offered me one of my own cigarettes. 'Go on, one more ain't gonna hurt. Let's face it, even a condemned man gets to have hisself a last smoke. This?' he said when he saw me staring at the lighter. 'It were give me by a mate, but here . . . you best have it. Never know when it might come in handy.'

I snatched the lighter from his hand, clutched it to my chest and burst into tears. A fortieth birthday present from Sophie, it was - and still is - one of my most treasured possessions. Maybe it was something in his eyes - a flicker of humanity, perhaps - that made me say, 'don't suppose you could spare a few minutes for a chat?'

‘As it happens, mate, I got all the time in the world. And know what? So have you.’ He put an arm around my shoulders and steered me back from the brink. ‘Kristy McGill,’ he said. ‘But they call me Krill. Leastways, they will one day.’