

APRIL 17, 3:54 P.M.



Can't I have this one moment to myself, please?

This thought sears in Aaron Boroff's mind as the sobbing girl passes behind him. She's interrupted his solitude as he stares down at the undulating Hudson River from the south side of the George Washington Bridge.

He senses her presence as strongly as he feels the concrete walkway shaking frantically below him. He glances right and watches her walk toward New Jersey, head down. Then she stops maybe a hundred feet from him, approaches the ledge, and stands there, looking down at the empty space below her, just as he'd been doing.

He turns and glares at her. It's hard to see details from this distance. She's short, with long jet-black hair. Devastated, definitely. Same reason for being here? Probably.

He wonders: *Which one of us is worse off?* His gut twists. *Her, of course. I'm such a fucking coward to even be thinking of ending my life. People will forget about me because thinking about me is too embarrassing. I'm a failure in every way and I probably won't even manage to kill myself right.*

At the same time, he can't imagine withstanding this hole in his chest even a moment longer. Too, too much. It's like when he was eight and he wanted his mommy—only to remember she wasn't living with them anymore. Thinking this makes him sob audibly, and even though the vehicles and the wind and the buckling bridge are louder and more chaotic than anything he's ever blared on his headphones, the girl turns her head toward the sound, toward Aaron.

It is too far for eye contact, really. What they share is the basic idea of eye contact. And Aaron feels it for both of them. Awkwardness.

Why couldn't she have walked just a little farther?

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This is Tillie Stanley's time, and here is this interruption, this lost waif of a boy, his hair blowing in the hectic, wild wind. Tall, narrow, leaning in on himself like a branch about to snap. And she thinks, *Does this boy have to be here?* And then she thinks, *You know what? Fuck him. I am so tired of letting other people dictate my life.*

She looks away and grasps the nearly petrified metal railing with her hand and lifts her leg onto the other side so that she's straddling it. If he even tries to walk in her direction, she'll let go and end it. That's how serious she is. Her throat bone-dry. Her chest empty. Her head spinning wild.

Then the boy straddles the railing, too, and Tillie is like, *Oh, come on.* Suddenly they're facing each other like they're playing a deadly game of dare.

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Aaron wants to scream at her—*Leave me alone! This moment is mine. This is all I have left.*

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Tillie's brain is mottled with warring thoughts she can't quite decipher—she only knows they're getting in her way. *Be a big girl,*

she berates herself. *Pick up your damn thick leg and walk far enough away that he can't see you anymore.* But she's stuck there. She is too far gone, much too far gone to imagine suffering even one more minute of this life. No. Oblivion is the only answer. Whatever comes after—nothing or a lot of something unknown—cannot be worse than this. It's time to stop. To end.

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They remain that way for a few seconds. Then a few seconds more. Eye contact without being able to see each other's eyes.

And then, at 3:57—