“Really puts things into perspective, doesn’t it?”

“Hmmm?” Ebony answered absentmindedly. She hadn’t heard the question. She was far away, a distance of miles between her and the man standing next to her on the ledge.

“I said it really puts things into perspective, doesn’t it?” he responded, articulating the words more forcefully.

“What does?” Ebony said, still distracted and far-removed from the question being asked. The answer to her own question occurred to her soon after she had said it, but not before he had already uttered his reply.

“What do you think?” he said, a sense of intensity issuing forward with his voice. “Being up here, in the clouds, the world at your feet,” as if to emphasise his point, he threw his arms wide open, indicating the incredible scene laid out before them. Ahead of them, to the north, was the city centre, the points of its skyscrapers reaching far up into the sky, through the dense, low-lying layer of deep grey rain clouds – an omen of an approaching storm. To their left, the towers and skyscrapers of the city gave way to rolling green hills and pastures. To the right of them was the ocean, its coastline defined by the extremities of the city, whose towers ended suddenly just before the heaving, green-blue mass of water. And most importantly, below them – far below them – was the pavement.

“I don’t know what to think,” Ebony answered, desperately trying to fight back fear that had been threatening to break the surface of her emotions for a long time, but had only just now overwhelmed her. She let out an inaudible sob, yet still he took notice – it was as if he could sense her emotions, and that he understood them better than even she could herself. It seemed to Ebony as if it was his instinct – he somehow knew, by nature, what people were thinking. He could, through the slightest body movements and facial expressions, discern everything a person was contemplating at a certain point in time. And Ebony knew that right now, he was conscious of the fact that she was considering not doing it.

“Ebony,” he said, his voice undergoing a change from cold and icy to warm and comforting. “There’s no reason to be afraid. You know that this is the right thing to do. In your heart, Ebony, you know you’re going to jump.”

Jump. The word hit Ebony with the force of a speeding train. The reality of the circumstances that she was in dawned on her, and the seriousness of the situation set in. What was she doing up here? She didn’t want this. She needed to get down, now. Without thinking, she glanced downwards. The sight made her legs weak, and she became suddenly afraid that if she was not careful, she might happen to fall by accident. Thirty-five stories up, then thirty-five stories down, she thought, words that he had once told her resurfacing for a fleeting moment and then diving back down into the depth of her subconsciousness. Yes, she said to herself. Thirty-five stories down, but not this way.

She spun around, leaping away from the edge of the building to the relative safety of its roof. He was on her in a heartbeat, however, having already calculated her actions. He grabbed onto her arm and, with a violent movement, jerked her back towards him. He brought his strong forearm around her neck, applying tight pressure, and dragged her forcefully towards the building’s edge. He leaned her out over the side, so that she was facing upwards, staring into his eyes. She experienced a wave of terror as she realised how calm they were – blue and serene, they created a disturbing juxtaposition with the pained and laboured expression on his otherwise handsome face. It was as if he was only struggling with his actions on the outside – on the inside, he was as calm as anyone ever could be.

“Ebony, you know this is right. I’m helping you. That’s what I do. I help people.” The words were so hauntingly unemotional, delivered in an entirely phlegmatic way.

Ebony was beyond fear now. She was captivated by the words he was saying, his voice and
most of all, his eyes, in which she now saw a glint of excitement. She was disgusted, but an abnormal fascination compelled her to endure holding his gaze.

“You’re lucky, Ebony. You really are.”

Those eyes, she thought. They’re eyes with a story – of a young boy without a mother, unloved by his father. Somebody who bullied and was bullied at school, hoping that by taking his pain out on others it would be carried to them, and that he would be relieved of it. The kind of person who could only find solace on the Internet, in chat rooms and on social networking sites, where he could talk to teenagers who felt the same way as he had oh god oh god I was one of those teenagers! Ebony began to panic once more as fear took her, struggling fruitlessly against his strong grip on her.

He continued speaking, his demeanour completely unchanged despite her efforts to escape. “See, I can’t leave. Not yet. But you can! Don’t you see what kind of opportunity this is?”

“Why don’t you just hurry up and drop me?” Ebony spat at him through clenched teeth.

“I’m not going to drop you, Ebony. This is something you have to do for yourself.”

Ebony was overcome by fear. She lost her composure and began to scream, the high-pitched, razor-sharp noise echoing in the stillness of the air. After what seemed like a long while, she fell silent again, the only sound in the mid-afternoon atmosphere being that of distant thunder, ominously rumbling miles away.

“In a few moments, Ebony, I’m going to let go of you,” he said. “You can stand back on the ledge if you like. But I have to be sure that one way or another, you’re going to do this.”

Ebony nodded her head hesitantly – there was no purpose in doing anything otherwise. He had her playing his game, by his rules – and Ebony had accepted the fact that there was only ever going to be one winner. He nodded also, indicating his agreement with her decision. Slowly, he began to pull her back away from the edge of the building.

“Let go of the girl, now,” said a deep voice from the other side of the building. Ebony sensed him freeze at the sound of the voice, his body becoming rigid and inflexible. He remained that way, perfectly still, for a few long moments.

“I said, let go of her!” the voice demanded. Ebony looked up into his eyes, which were suddenly filled with fiery rage. His body quivered against her, like the tremor of an earthquake. He snapped his eyes shut and, after a few seconds, reopened them. They were calm once more.

“No,” he muttered. Then, louder, “NO!” Abruptly, he dashed forward towards the ledge, still keeping a tight grip on Ebony. She screamed and struggled, batting desperately at him with her hands. Her attacks had no effect, and he ran straight towards the edge of the building, then over, and down. The ground rushed up to meet them. Somewhere, far away, lightning struck – a roaring crack like the sound of bones hitting the pavement.