

1

A fall from the twenty-third floor would be more than enough to do it.

Access to the rooftop of a multi-storey building turned out to be surprisingly easy. Sullivan had prepared a story: 'I'm a location scout, wanting to suss out this rooftop as a possible film location.' But in the end he didn't need to bullshit anyone.

The door to the roof stairs did carry a sign – 'No unauthorised access' – but as Sullivan approached it, the door swung open from the outside. A handy piece of luck.

A guy heading back inside leaned his weight against the heavy metal door, holding it open so Sullivan could get out.

'Thanks, mate,' Sullivan said, shuffling through the gap, his Hawaiian shirt lightly brushing the other man's stripy business shirt. That close, the smell of the guy was notable: just-smoked cigarette plus the sour stink of last night's fags seeping through his pores. The man pressed his lips together in a sort of smile, a smile of mutual shame, assuming Sullivan was going outside to smoke too.

As Sullivan stepped onto the rooftop, hearing the door thud closed, it occurred to him that the sad smoker was the last human being he would ever encounter.

Around an air-conditioning duct was a small midden of cigarette butts and a dark stain on the concrete, tacky enough for fluff and grit to stick to it. The smell of urine hit Sullivan and he pictured a

semi-circle of miserable men in striped shirts pissing onto that sticky patch while they sucked on cigarettes.

He felt a bit of sick come up into his throat, stinging yellow bile. It could be the stench of urine and fags making him nauseous. It could be after-burn from the half a bottle of cooking marsala he'd found in the cupboard. It could just be nerves. Didn't matter. He had to get on with this task.

Sullivan checked that his driver's licence was easy to locate in his wallet, alongside the note that stated his desire to be cremated or somehow disposed of with no funeral. He didn't want anyone to go to any expense. He then shoved the wallet deep into his back pocket. When they found him at the bottom, they would need ID. So they'd know it was Sullivan Moss.

He wasn't sure who qualified as his next of kin now his mother was dead. He was an orphan now. Could a person consider himself an orphan at thirty-nine years old? He wondered if people who had children of their own felt like orphans when their parents died.

Thinking about dead parents was a stupid mistake because it got him thinking about his mother – a benign woman who deserved better from her only child than hurried phone calls made while waiting in kebab shops or Centrelink queues. She deserved better than a dozen promises he'd visit her in hospital, promises sincerely made in the moment but thoughtlessly broken in some other moment. And then there was Pete.

When Pete lay dying in hospital, Sully had never made contact, too ashamed to face him – a steadfast friend who'd put up with Sully's shit for decades, a truly good man who'd spent part of every year doctoring in remote desert communities, humble, tolerant, generous . . . Bloody hell, the guy probably got the melanoma that killed him because he'd worked so much under the desert sun curing the sick and saving lives. How could Sullivan have walked into that hospital room and said, 'Well, Pete, you – an unquestionably valuable addition to the planet – are about to die while I – a fucking waste of floor-space – will live on'?

And here it came again: the disgust flushed through Sully's body, sucking with it every bad thing he'd ever done, every failure, every crime – nothing big enough to be glamorous or worthy of anti-hero respect . . . Just an endless stream of tawdry stuff, petty betrayals and selfishness. The sticky shameful things adhered to each other to form a toxic lump in his insides.

Sullivan didn't want to feel that any more. Which was the whole point of coming up to this rooftop.

He stepped over to the section of the roof where only a one-metre wall guarded the edge. He'd picked this method because he figured if he could summon the courage to pitch forward at a sufficient angle, then he'd have to succeed. His customary cowardice and inability to see things through to a proper conclusion wouldn't get in his way. He'd just be falling with no choice in the matter and the thing would get done.

Sullivan stepped up onto the low wall and peered over the edge. The job of obliterating himself shouldn't be a huge effort, considering he'd made so little meaningful impact on the world. He looked down at the bitumen surface of the car park one hundred and fifty metres below.

Was his torso like a skin bag full of blood and organs, a bag that would split open on impact? That's not how they usually showed it in movies. But movie versions of things couldn't be trusted. Not the way a fall from the twenty-third storey could be trusted to achieve a certain result.

His legs were trembling. The yellow bile oozed up his gullet again. The temazepam he'd taken to steady himself kicked in and he felt himself keel over. He was falling, feeble and boneless, unable to hold himself upright even if he were to try.