

ELIZABETH KUIPER

The Trouble With Suicide

Would you call that a suicide attempt? Isabelle was not sure. There was the *intent* of committing suicide. There was a plan. But was it an attempt?

Isabelle had caught the number 19 tram into the city, the hood of her green parka pulled tight to hide her wet, red eyes. She quickly—but without pushing in front of her fellow passengers—disembarked at the last stop. From here, she walked to a bridge in the shadow of Flinders Station and Flinders Square, overlooking the dull green of the Yarra River.

This was not a place of any significance for Isabelle, other than a part of Melbourne she had traversed with some regularity. In fact, she was only here because it was the first place that sprang to mind when she decided this whole ‘living life’ business was becoming too taxing. In retrospect, it was an altogether very stupid plan—as most poorly thought-out plans inevitably are.

That being said, Isabelle regarded her death much like a wedding: she was worried if she spent too long obsessing over the nitty gritty details—the venue, the music, the date, the dress—she’d get cold feet and call the whole thing off. No, she had decided her death was something that required minimal planning. A Band-Aid. A break-up. One motion. Right off.

Yet, as she stood upon Flinders St. Bridge at 10.12 p.m. on a Thursday night, she could not help but wish she had at least made a quick

brainstorm of how she intended it to all play out.

Firstly, the timing was wrong. 10 p.m. was certainly not late enough in the evening to commit the act without witnesses. Throngs of theatregoers spilled out of Hamer Hall and onto the street pavement with clockwork-like regularity. Just as soon as Isabelle detected a gap of time without a soul in sight, a spritely jogger with cordless headphones playing dull techno would round the corner, or a group of young girls in black skirts with linked arms would burst into laughter, somewhere in the distance.

Yes, the timing was wrong. Some may wonder why it mattered to Isabelle, that she was in close proximity to strangers. Surely, someone so deeply mentally troubled, someone expressing a desire to end one's life, wouldn't care in the slightest about who bore witness? In the same way that senile geriatrics adorn their hats with pipe cleaners bent into flower shapes and expel gas from their bodies with impunity, someone on the verge of death must be equally apathetic. After all, she wouldn't be alive to deal with the consequences of public reaction. What would it matter?

But a big, flashy suicide with spectators was not Isabelle's style. Although, admittedly, she had not put much thought into this whole event, she did know how she wanted it to be read: as the quiet fulfilment of a desire to simply cease existing. As the exhaustion of options, A, B, C, with D for Death the only path available. That was what she wanted. What she did *not* want was her brain plastered in sinewy chunks across the ceiling, or a note left in blood drawn from her freshly sliced wrists. There wasn't some big statement she wanted to make and a huge gesture seemed a bit gaudy.

However, the thought did cross her mind that if she were to die anyway, why not benefit someone else in doing so? She could have written a protest letter, about the treatment of refugees on Nauru, for example, whose living conditions implicated Australia in the most egregious abuse of human rights. Isabelle's death, the death of a young, bright, white woman, with so much to live for, could have been a wake-up call for the government! *My God*, people would say as they sipped their lattes and pored over the morning paper, *she sacrificed her life to free her fellow humans. A modern day Mahatma Gandhi. A Mandela. A Mother Teresa with better eyebrows.*

Isabelle attempted to curb this thought process. Thinking about what the men and women and children who sought asylum had struggled through, and her comparatively privileged life, made her feel guilty for wanting to take this path. What right does she have to feel this way? How dare she cut short a life that only appears in the longing daydreams of most? The visceral shame of how inherently selfish her suicide would be, paradoxically, made her desire all the more urgent.

Moreover, a protest suicide would be inauthentic. It would paint Isabelle as someone better than she was. An activist. A champion. A rebel. If Isabelle thought herself capable of having an impact on the world, as being the type of person who could affect change, as someone who actually *mattered*, then she mightn't have found herself in the situation she was in on Thursday night. It was a *Catch-22*, a book Isabelle never actually finished reading because if she couldn't bring herself to care about the minutiae of brushing her teeth and changing her sheets, she certainly couldn't drum up interest for the paranoid musings of Captain John Yossarian who believed everyone was trying to kill him, and his unwavering quest to stay alive in spite of this.

If Isabelle had planned it, perhaps she would have gone the way of Virginia Woolf, pebbles in pockets, wading into the River Ouse. This would have been much more dignified than plunging into the Yarra, with the lights of consultancy firms illuminating her final moments; a Hungry Jack's Whopper Meal wrapper floating past her corpse. Then again, paying homage to a modernist writer through death—one who suffered with the same *condition*, as it was euphemistically referred to at the time—would have been too pretentious, too premeditated, and maybe even a little too fucking predictable.

The venue was wrong for other reasons. Flinders St. Bridge, and a plunge into the Yarra. The drop had seemed so much greater in her memory, but as Isabelle peered down into the water from above, the thought occurred to her that one might jump and quite likely survive. Olympic divers had surely somersaulted off higher surfaces. And while Isabelle wasn't an amazing swimmer, she could indeed

swim, a fact of her childhood that—along with the usual dozens of others—she resented at that moment. She knew that if she were to jump, her survival instincts would kick in long enough to keep herself afloat in the ice-cool water while one of the inevitable, nosey bystanders called for help.

It would be such an ordeal, surviving after that. She'd definitely have ruined at least several people's Thursday night plans. From the passers-by to the emergency response workers who were probably enjoying a cheeky smoke break by the station before receiving a call out for another young, female suicide attempt. *Oh, not again*, they'd say as they'd stomp out their butts and clamber into the vehicle, wondering if the silly twat had jumped purely for attention or simply lacked the commonsense to gauge how harmful the impact of an eight-meter jump would be. Isabelle wondered if she even had ambulance cover or if she'd be slapped with a hefty bill after they cleared her for safety?

Of course, she'd inconvenience a few people. But she would destroy her mother. Her mother, who had footed the bill for her psychologist appointments over the years, who eagerly asked after each session if Isabelle thought she was 'getting better'. Her mother, who did nothing but express love and support for her only child. Her mother, who had already grieved the loss of someone unable, or unwilling, to cling to the threads of life long enough to attend his daughter's ninth birthday party.

No, Isabelle could not kill herself. She wouldn't be able to live with the shame.

Sheepishly, Isabelle jumped back on the number 19 tram, which gently pulled her out of the city, and retreated into the northern suburbs of Melbourne. When she thought she was going to die, she did not think to take her My-Ki with her. But now she was headed home, she was struck with a concern that Transit Officers might catch her freeloading. What an awful day that would be; failed suicide *and* a fare-evasion fine.

Yes, all things considered, it was a very stupid idea. It was so poorly orchestrated it was almost amusing. Isabelle wondered, if comedy was simply tragedy plus time, how long it would be until she could

laugh at herself. And whether that laugh would be forgiving and light like a breeze through wind chimes or the hard, self-deprecating caw that accompanied her every waking thought.

Isabelle gazed at her fellow passengers; at the teenage couple eating from the same frozen yoghurt cup, at the 30-something-year-old woman balancing overflowing grocery bags on her thighs whilst trying to dissuade her young child from wandering too far down the passage.

Isabelle focused on a girl, roughly her own age, clad in a pale blue work shirt, her hair scraped back in a tight bun, holding her phone to her lips to speak with her headphones still in. Isabelle wondered if this girl was happy. The name tag still pinned to her shirt suggested 'checkout chick', or maybe someone who worked for a telecom company. Isabelle wondered if this girl had a nice routine in her life. Maybe she walked the dog in the morning, before heading into the CBD where she'd crack jokes with her co-workers and buy a grilled chicken Subway sandwich on her lunch break. She wondered whether this girl had someone at home to greet her after a long shift, to run her a bath and kiss the nape of still wet neck as she emerges from the bathroom in a towel; whether she has friends she calls, and who call her. Isabelle wonders whether, this girl who seemingly has everything on paper, may sporadically feel an overwhelming urge to rip it up and incinerate the sheet simply because her mind told her to.

Gazing out the window, as Elizabeth Street became Royal Parade, and Royal Parade became Sydney Road, Isabelle pondered doing it another time, doing it properly. Next time she would plan it better. She'd leave a note; *Mum, I love you. This isn't your fault. I promise.* The location would be secluded and the timing calculated. Maybe she'd make sure to clear her browser history, or put together a nice outfit. She would seek out the light at the end of the tunnel, that great, white light which would bring another form of lightness, a weightlessness, as all her burdens and neuroses would melt off her human form like a popsicle in summer, leaving just her core, her soul, her heart, whatever you wanted to call it, behind.

But Isabelle decided that wouldn't do. For much like a wedding, a suicide is something people only do once in their life, unless they

fail the first time. And you don't throw a second wedding the day after your first. No, by then, the moment has passed. The desire may return some day, but until it does, 'you just have to deal with feeling like shit and eating leftover frozen chicken fillets'.