

# THE QUARRY

Janet Holst

## Flying

James stands at the bus stop with his schoolbag, waiting for the 722. It's Wednesday, and he mustn't be late home – it's Mum's choir night. But where *is* the bus? So much of his life is spent waiting, when he really wants to be moving. Ah, here it is at last, the bus, *inching* down the road like an old lady, and his heart goes out to it, wills it along, but it's blocked at the lights; and he wants to stretch out a giant hand and pick it up, *save it*. If he were Action Man, he wouldn't be standing here on Wednesday after sports practice, after Mr Grainger pulled him up for not having trainers, Last Warning, he said. No, he'd be – but there's something sudden up there: a man in the sky. *Flying*. With his arms stretched out, and his white coat open like a wing; and he's really flying – it's like that painting – up high against the blue, the one that Mrs Richards showed them, the boy with wax wings, and the sea and cows and farmers and things all below, not noticing. But James had noticed. *With my little eye*. The boy's foot, the little splash. What must it be like? Up high in the silent blue, looking down at the tiny buses and cars rolling underneath, for the traffic is moving again, and the 722 is edging closer...

And the man's up there. The Flyer. Like God. And the high viaduct is behind him, packed with traffic...but *No!* Not flying, after all, but *falling* – flat and fast from the viaduct down to the cars and roaring buses and tankers piled up at the lights. *So fast*. And James doesn't, can't see him land, because the ice-cream truck is just there, and people are shouting and running and pushing, just as the bus grinds in, the doors

hissing open, and the driver saying, ‘Are-ya-gedding-on-or-aren’t-cha?’ James pulls himself up onto the step.

Through the back window of the bus the traffic is stopped, and people are crowding in the middle of the road – gawking. *Rubber necking*. But the bus is moving away, past the post office, past the McDonalds and the hot dog stand on the corner, past a woman with a fat stomach pushing a pram and two kids shoving each other off the footpath. And they don’t know. *None of them knows*. It’s as if nothing’s happened. Like Mrs Richard’s picture, and the poem she read to go with the picture, but that was all peaceful: if you fell in water, you’d just slip in, cool, the water closing above you, and down below to the fishes. But to land smack on the pavement – or what if you were driving, and someone fell smack on your windshield, like birds sometimes when they get blinded. But what about *him*, why jump on the traffic? Was he blinded too? An ambulance comes wailing, pushing away the traffic, and a police car whoops along the shoulder flashing red lights.

But the bus goes on.

‘I saw a man flying,’ he says when he gets home. ‘But he fell, and an ambulance came.’

‘Oh?’ says Mum, cooking. ‘Put your bag away and change, there’s a good lad, before your dad gets back.’

He showers with eyes closed, the water pelting hard on his face, and sees again the figure floating across the afternoon sky, but now it’s James himself, high in the silent blue on his own flight path: not falling, not landing – but flying.

*Endlessly.*