

THE WATER TOWER by Amy Yount

EXCERPT

Chapter 1

She stood on the water tower, looking at the skyline she had only observed from the ground. You really could see the whole town from up here. Funny how your whole life can fit into one 360-degree glance. Peering down at the ground, she was no longer able to see individual blades of grass, all of them blurring into a sea of perfect emerald green. To her right was the roof of Lakeview High School, looking small from this vantage point. She felt as though if she leaned over far enough, she could almost touch it. But that was ridiculous; the school had to be several hundred feet away. Her vision came in and out of focus as she swayed, thinking about her life, her past, her future.

In her three years at the school, she had never been up on the tower. No one she knew had been up here, either. Most students wouldn't dare to scale it. Too scared of getting caught, too scared of breaking the rules, too scared of living. When she looked down at the ground, she thought she could see movement, like little grass men dancing and hopping around through a crowd of their peers. Kind of like high school. More like, *exactly* like high school. Everyone looks the same; maybe some are a bit taller, a bit shorter, a bit wider, but everyone dressed in essentially the same uniform, hopping over one another, trying to make their mark.

How many feet above the ground was she—50, 60 feet? Was that high enough to kill you, or maybe just break a few bones? It would probably depend on how you hit the ground. Here she was, high above the town, pondering the angle at which you might hit the ground and live through the fall, the velocity at which an object might fall from here.

Her body felt warm all over, despite the crisp air of late fall, and she took off her jacket and threw it aside. She leaned against the rail and spread her arms, allowing the breeze to blow through her, inhabiting every cell for just a moment, before moving off in another direction to go dance with someone else. Her 17 years had all been spent here, in this one place, in this small, boring town where, it seemed, nothing was all that was destined to happen.

The clock tower chimed; it was 11:00. She felt she had eternity in front of her, the rest of this night, the rest of her life, stuck here in this town. Would she ever get out? Did it even matter if she did? She thought about the college catalogs arriving at home, the hundreds of pages of sales pitches clamoring for her family's money. The sprawling campuses, the smiling students, the serious, but friendly, professors—what was the point? She would just end up back here, raising the same family as her friends, living the same life that her kids would eventually live.

Reaching out her slender arm, she twirled her wrist. She could hardly wait for graduation when, everyone said, “real life” would begin. “I can't wait to get out of here,” her friends exclaimed, dreaming of big cities and even bigger lives in far off places: Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, anywhere but here. But she knew they would return, just like their parents, raising 2.5 kids with a Labradoodle and a balding husband in one of the best-little-suburbs in the country. Was it really so bad? She watched all these super-educated women who had given up their careers to stay home and clean up after the kids and drive to soccer practice, instead of changing the world as they'd so hopefully planned when plotting their escape years earlier. Was that her fate? Was that what awaited her now? Dozens of similar thoughts swirled and crashed like waves in front of her, mixing in a fantastic spray of colors, lights, and sounds.

She was dead before she hit the ground.