

## Chapter 12 The Bridge

The bridge was made of wood and had spaces all the way across, through which you could look straight down into the river. There was a narrow walkway on either side of the tracks – wide enough so that you wouldn't actually get hit by any train, but so narrow that the wind of a passing train would blow you off the bridge. And it was a long way down to the river, and the river was shallow and fast. In fact, this bridge wasn't for walking across.

Looking at the bridge, we all felt fear start to move in our stomachs, but mixing with the fear was the excitement of a really big dare, something you could be proud to tell your friends about after you got home . . . *if* you got home. Teddy's eyes were shining: this was better than lorries.

'Man,' Chris said softly.

'Come on,' Teddy said. 'Let's go.' He was already at the start of the bridge, where the wooden supports were built out over the land.

'Does anybody know when the next train's due?' Vern asked uneasily.

Nobody knew.

I said, 'There's the Route 136 bridge . . .'

'No, man!' Teddy cried. 'That means walking five miles down the river on this side and then five miles back on the other side. It'll take hours. We can cross the bridge and get to the same place in *ten minutes*.'

'But if a train comes, there's nowhere to go,' Vern said. He wasn't looking at Teddy; he was looking down at the river.

'Of course there is,' Teddy said. He climbed over the edge of the bridge and held on to one of the wooden supports between the tracks. He was still hanging over the land, but the thought of doing that in the middle of the bridge, with the river fifty

feet below and a train thundering by overhead, made me feel sick.

'See how easy it is?' Teddy said. He dropped to the ground, wiped his hands and climbed back up beside us.

'What if it's a 200-car train?' Chris asked. 'Are you going to hang there for five or ten minutes?'

'Are you afraid?' Teddy asked. 'You can go the long way round if you want to, but I'm going across the bridge. I'll wait for you on the other side!'

'There are probably only one or two trains a day here,' I said, 'and one has passed us already. Look at all the grass growing in the middle of the tracks.'

'See?' Teddy was delighted at his victory.

'There's still a *chance* of a train,' I added.

'Yes,' Chris said. He was looking only at me, his eyes shining. 'I dare you, Lachance.'

'Darers go first.'

'All right,' Chris said. He looked at the others as well. 'Any pussies here?'

'NO!' Teddy shouted.

Vern cleared his throat and said 'no' in a small voice. He smiled a weak, sickly smile.

'OK,' Chris said . . . but we hesitated for a moment and looked up and down the tracks. I knelt down and touched the steel. Nothing.

'OK,' I said.

We went out on to the bridge one by one: Chris first, then Teddy, then Vern, and me last because I was the one who said that darers go first.

You had to walk looking down, to make sure you put your feet down on wood rather than thin air. When I saw river instead of rocks below me, I stopped to look up. Chris and Teddy were a long way in front, almost halfway across the bridge. Vern was