

GRAVE GOODS

Today I walked past this guy standing on a pedestrian bridge over a South London train line. He was peering out intently between the metal bars down towards the tracks and platform below. He looked pretty wide-eyed and focused on watching. He was holding a large cloth duffel bag on his shoulder. I imagined what he was watching. In my head I thought maybe he was staring at someone he knew below on the platform. Maybe there was a cute girl. Maybe he was a jealous lover spying on his partner. I felt a little unsure and uneasy of his seemingly erratic behaviour as I walked closely behind him.

I entered the station to walk down onto the platform and several girls began screaming. The man that was peeping through the bridge was actually waiting for the next express train and trying to judge his timing to leap off the bridge to kill himself. I didn't see that coming.

I tried to comfort the shocked onlookers who had witnessed his leap from the bridge and his subsequent flattening by the speeding train. I watched as confused station staff ran around, not really knowing the protocol as to what they should do.

At first I didn't look to see the body and thought maybe I shouldn't. People were telling each other not to look and that it was horrible. I imagined he was severed with limbs all over the tracks. I thought maybe I didn't need to see it. One young girl was taking photos on her iPhone and my curiosity got the better of me. I looked down to the tracks. The man had been dragged or launched about fifteen metres down the tracks. His body lay lifeless and I could see some red highlighting his head.

Back closer to the site of impact was his cloth duffel bag sitting upright and unaffected. This was the most curious thing to me. The bag. It was obviously full with the zip done up tightly. I remember him holding it over his shoulder on the bridge. Why bother having a bag full of things when jumping off a bridge to kill yourself? Had he packed especially for the occasion? Maybe he particularly wanted his belongings to go with him?

In ancient cultures 'grave goods' were objects belonging to the deceased, which were buried with them to ease their transition into the afterlife and as offerings to the Gods. Sometimes extra things were packed like fruits and grains. Essentially a packed lunch just in case there was a long journey and no Sainsbury's or Tesco Express on the other side. This cloth duffel bag perhaps held this mans entire life history. A personal archive of his existence. Things he held dear and wanted to keep close in eternity. Or maybe he was just like me after work. A bag of dirty clothes, an empty lunchbox and depressed about wasting another day.

David Turley, 2015