

James had intended proposing to Sarah when they reached the top of the Harbour Bridge but another climber, Darren, came between them at the crucial moment when the catches were being attached to the rail. He apologised but it was too late by then; the damage was done.

'This your first time, mate?' asked Darren, turning his head as they cleared the ladders to start the climb proper.

'First time,' confirmed James.

'I've done it four times myself,' said Darren. 'Loved it every time.'

James didn't answer; all he could think of was how he had spent seven months planning this proposal and now it was ruined.

Eighteen feet ahead of him, Sarah was breathing carefully as she climbed. As she turned her head to the right to look at the Opera House, she realised the climb wasn't quite as scary as she'd anticipated.

'It's like a boat, isn't it?' she asked, turning to Darren, forgetting for a moment that he was a stranger. 'The roof shells look like sails and the base is like the stern of a ship. It's as if it's about to set sail from the harbour.'

Darren looked at the building; he had never thought of it quite like that before. He told her about the orange segment concept and something in the way he spoke made her want to ask him more questions.

The climb continued and Sarah wondered why she felt such a strong urge to turn to Darren again. It wasn't that he was particularly handsome, but there was something about him. Something special. She had a feeling that if she asked him about the Pyramid of Giza, or the Oracle at Delphi, then he would know about their construction, the meaning behind their creation; that he would have visited them and not bothered to take photographs, but collected stories instead.

Later, as they discarded their climbsuits, Sarah suggested to James that they invite him to join them for a drink.

'He's probably busy,' said James, who had decided that he would propose over dinner instead.

'Well, we can only ask,' she replied.

He watched as she tapped him on the shoulder and he turned around to display a dazzling smile, running his hand through his hair as she blushed and talked to him. A few moments later she ran back, her face lit up, excitement spilling from every pore.

'He hasn't any plans,' she said, swallowing quickly. 'He says there's a wonderful restaurant near here he can take us to.'

James smiled, unsure what to do for the best. How quickly you can lose someone, he thought as he threw his gloves and hat into the basket. He had ascended the bridge planning a proposal; he had descended it wondering whether he would ever find another woman quite like Sarah, who was lost to him already; he knew her well enough to know that.

He wondered whether he should just take a pass on dinner and leave them to it.