

Prologue.

The door to the toilet slams open and I turn to the noise. Two men in suits, one tall, one small, barrel across the tiles and pin me to the wall. The tall one is grinning like a cat on speed and he grabs my arm, spins me around to connect with the fist of the short one and I go into stun mode.

They are strong and the tall one kicks my feet from under me and they haul me out of the toilet and onto the fire escape. I try to resist and receive a slap to the head for every word I utter. Seven slaps - I'm a slow learner.

We hit the roof at full speed and I'm lifted clean off my feet and hurled over the edge.

Chapter 1

Tina needs a break.

‘Get your own tea’

God I could spit. You wear a skirt, sit next to a computer and some male tosser thinks you’re the office slave. Why the hell would I want to make tea? When was the last time someone made tea for me? It’s not in my bloody job description. I know - I looked. Bad day already and it’s not even past ten. Time to take a cigarette break.

Even a ciggie break is a pain in the rear end. When I started work, smoking was almost compulsory. By mid morning the fug in the office was so thick that it blurred the edges of the people, my wonderful work colleagues, who sat at the far end of the office. Crashing fags was a given. It was an unwritten offence to come to work with less than a twenty pack and you were in the mire if you came back from foreign climes with anything less than a box of two hundred.

How it’s all changed for us lepers. First we were banished to a hell hole of a room in the basement. Just an awful place! No windows. No decoration and rock hard chairs. Like a secret meeting of some perverse society we sat, drawing in, in turn, your own cigarette smoke and then someone else’s. But at least it was a place to go and, crappy or not, you could escape from work for ten minutes.

Then we were relegated to the street. Correction, relegated to a spot in the lane round the corner from

our front door. There we would huddle rain, shine, snow, wind. Backs to the elements - drawing sustenance and complaining. Complaining, complaining and complaining. Complaining about our bosses, our work colleagues, our staff, our spouses, our neighbours, the newsreader on BBC1, the girl in reception with the worst dress sense on the planet, the security guard with the breath of Satan, the pay, the conditions, the weather, the lack of toilet rolls last Tuesday, the smell of urine in the lane, the size of Mars Bars (yes they were bigger in the past), the price of a cup of coffee in Starbucks, the taste of a cup of coffee in Starbucks, the unisex toilet in Starbucks (but we still go to Starbucks), the cost of petrol, the cost of living, the cost of smoking. Complaining is what we do best and the time to do it is during a fag break. And now in another clampdown by the cigarette police we are to be banished from the lane.

It seems our mounting doubts (the ciggy kind not the mental kind) and the sheer number of addicts that congregate to partake have caused other people to complain - ironic or what! We have been told to find a spot away from our building.

As a group we are fairly sure this is illegal but it gives us something else to complain about and has, to be fair, given birth to an unforeseen opportunity. An opportunity spotted by yours truly.

I had been talking to Satan Breath about the ban on smoking in the lane and to my surprise he informed me he was also a smoker. Since I hadn't seen him in the leper colony I asked where he

smoked. 'The roof' he informed me. And so was born the mile high club.

Smoking on the roof is strictly against company policy and no doubt it is against safety regulations, local bye laws and the civil liberties of the pigeons that now have to inhale our waste products. But for a short window it is also glorious.

The roof could have been custom designed for smoking. Stunning views, plenty of shelter, easy access and the world's largest dustbin - just chuck the ciggies over the edge. Satan Breath has assured us that the twenty storey fall will put out the burning stub well before it hits the ground. Just to be on the safe side we sling them into the lane. This will no doubt confuse the hell out of the office manager. No smokers in the lane but lots of used cigarettes. It won't last. Can't last. Someone will blab and we will be ejected. But while the going is good, let's smoke.

It's just warming up on the roof today and there is no one else around. Unusual for this time of day! Maybe we've been found out and I'm the last to know and, any moment now, someone will burst from the fire escape to arrest me.

I think I'll enjoy my moment of solitude on the west wing today. Not the best view. A forty storey office block sits just across the lane but there is a small sun trap and a vent that can be used as a seat. An uncomfortable seat - but a seat none the less.

I light up, look up and nearly throw up. Above me on the block opposite there is a man falling from the roof. One foot on the roof - the rest of him hanging out in space.

Mother!

Chapter 2

Charlie learns to fly.

Falling is the last thing I wanted to do. You really don't fancy it when you're standing on the edge of a forty storey building and all that stands between you and the road below is a few hundred feet of fresh air. But, hey life's not all a bed of roses and sometimes it throws you a dodgy one and you either fight it or bend over and wait for the bad news to arrive.

In my case the bad news was on its way. If you've ever stood next to a large drop and possess half the vertigo that I suffer from then, that feeling you get in your bowel, the one that resembles a full on food mixer, take it, triple it, add on some brown sauce for seasoning and you might get close to what I was going through.

Not that I wanted to be stepping out into the wide blue. Far from it! I had a million other things I would rather have been doing. Don't ask me for the full million long list - but you get the gig. I didn't want to go freefalling without the benefit of a safety net or at least a parachute.

What I did want to do was to move four feet to my left and stay there. Simple really! Not much to ask for. No great demand of life, God and the universe. Not as if I'm asking for a win on the lottery or a weekend with Cybil McLean. You won't know Cybil but trust me if you are male, straight and alive you would like Cybil.

It's not even as if I'm asking to add a hundred years to my lifespan. Ten minutes would be good. Ten seconds would be a starting point. Anything other than the three or four seconds between now and the concrete waiting below!

On the plus side I can see a lot from up here. Not that its registering that well but it's still a hell of a view. On a better day it would be worth trying to grab a few photos. Maybe even a video. I heard once that the last image you see before you die stays embedded on your retina. Maybe I should pick out a good landmark, stare at it and close my eyes. That way the coroner can stare into my dead eyes and view a pleasant snapshot from five hundred feet up - one for the morgue wall maybe.

I still have one foot on the roof but no chance of redemption. One foot, in this case, is one foot too few. A fully planted foot with all my weight would give me hope. Unfortunately I have less than the tip of my shoe left on the building and even that is about to go airborne.

I also resemble something of a windmill at the moment. Arms flailing. Leg flailing - leg singular - not legs - my tiny connection to the roof prevents my left leg joining in the fun. My head is flailing. My heart is flailing. Hell even my dick is flailing. Not that this excess of flailing is making a blind bit of difference to my fate - but then again what would?

Maybe a man can fly? Maybe world class flailing precedes the ability to soar like a bird and I'll soon find myself buzzing around the sky.

I'm also screaming. Not words. Just sounds. Strange, I would have thought that words such as 'No' or more likely 'Noooooooooooo' would have been up there as a more likely response to my situation. But I seem to have reverted to a high pitch wail.

Wail and flail that's me.

My name is Charlie Wiggs and I'm fifty four years old. I planned on making fifty five until less than ten minutes ago when two gorillas entered the toilet, picked me up and threw me off the roof of the building I have happily worked in for some thirty years.

I can see them both now, watching my impending demise, dressed in tightly fitting grey suits, muscles pressing hard on the material. Gorilla number one is shorter than me - and that takes some doing. Hair cropped to the bone and a handlebar moustache that was last seen on the Village People. He hasn't uttered a word but growls a lot from the back of his throat.

Gorilla number two is taller. A good foot on me. Long greasy hair and designer or just lazy-man stubble. He seems to be the more articulate of the two although this only stretches as far as shouting 'Shut the fuck up' on a regular basis.

I'd guess the gorillas are both in their forties and their guts, nicely hanging out over their waistband in best beer belly tradition, suggest that brute force rather than physical fitness is the order of the day in their line of work. People that like their pop and food and rely on muscle built up many years ago to get by in their day to day work.

Both are surprisingly fragrant. If I'm not mistaken gorilla number one is wearing L'Eau D'Issey Pour Homme by Issey Miyake. A favourite of mine. Gorilla number two is more a Lynx man. Even their breath has a fresh tinge. Nice to know I'm being murdered by hygienic people.

None of this helps with the key question that has bounced round my head since leaving the toilet in such a rush. Why? Who the hell would want to murder a fifty four year old accountant with a life that would bore a saint?

Why go to the bother of killing a man who, if asked politely, would clearly apologise for whatever it was he had done and point out that it couldn't have been him in the first place as he had never really knowingly done anything to warrant execution.

Alternatively this could be a new form of impulse killing akin to 'drive-by shooting,' only this is called 'walk-by throwing.' It could be a new craze that I have missed. Unless it was widely reported on Radio 2 there is a good chance I don't know about it. Individuals being thrown from high points all across the UK. Happy chucking not happy slapping.

Gorilla number two is now holding a phone in my direction. Filming it for 'You Tube' no doubt. Well maybe in death I'll achieve a level of fame that was denied me in life.

'Hope it was worth it you thievin' prick.'

That was gorilla number two demonstrating his range of vocabulary. The comment was aimed at me. Me who once lifted a Mars Bar from the corner

shop when I was in S3. Me a boy that crapped himself for a month after the incident - expecting the police to descend at any moment. It was two years before I had the guts to go in to the shop again and even then I felt that the shopkeeper was staring at a neon sign above my head saying 'Him - it's him. The Mars Bar Boy'.

'Thievin' prick?'

Give me a break - even my tax return has to be the most honest in history and I should know - after all my speciality is tax. I'm never off the bloody hotline when it comes to my own dealings. So much so that last year I received an irate call from the call centre supervisor asking me to come in for a chat as I was causing some distress to the staff with the frequency of my calls.

'Thievin' prick?' When, how? Who from? I couldn't. I wouldn't.

Did I?

I'll be dead soon but it would have been nice to know what the gorilla is referring to. Who I stole from? What I stole? Why I stole? If I stole?

The wind is getting up, trying to push me back towards the men in grey. Not hard enough to make any difference to my fate but it's cool on my face, drying the sweat. Pleasant almost. It's ruffling gorilla number two's hair and if I'm not mistaken there is more than a hint of a toupee about the way his hair is moving around. He half turns away from me to let the wind sweep over him from the back, protecting his wig from the next big gust. I feel like shouting out *'Hey wiggy!'* - but I don't - my screaming is getting in the way.

He keeps filming. At least I assume he is filming - either that or he is focussing on a particularly important text. I hope not. I hope he hasn't placed my demise below his girlfriend's request to pop into Tesco for some milk on the way home.

I'm falling.