

Vicki

In Limbo

There was a creak and a snap and a shudder. Then darkness.

Two screams brought even more terror to the situation. A screech like an untuned wireless, and another more shrill and operatic. Gasps and murmurs hummed within the confined space.

‘What just happened?’ cried a woman of maturity.

‘The lift hath thtopped,’ a man lisped.

‘I think we all know that,’ taunted a younger man, in a tone that was as smooth as bush honey.

Quick steps moved from one side of the darkness to the other, followed by a breeze and a thwack!

‘Ouch,’ cried a woman.

Thwack!

‘Oof’, croaked the older man, ‘What the hell!’

‘Sorry...oh...sorry,’ sniffed a soft voice from the corner.

‘Has anyone got a light,’ whined someone, sex indistinguishable.

‘I have a lighter,’ said the older man, ‘Oh...no I don’t.’

‘I have a phone,’ said the mellow voiced man.

Rustling, fumbling. Flash!

The interior of the elevator was lit by a beam that moved from one wall to another, like a prison search light. Hands covered faces as one after the other was caught in the spot light.

‘Aim it to the theiling, god-damn-it!’ rasped the older man.

It was, and rays reflected and shone down with better results. Arms dropped and heads moved from left to right, then right to left, like carnival clowns ready to swallow coloured balls.

Two older woman were shown huddled against the back wall. The thin one, in brown orthotics and a dress gaudily patterned with large red hibiscus flowers, looked like she’d caught her finger in a power socket. Her teetering hairstyle was a grey version of Madge Simpson’s. The other more stout one, glanced up, startled. She was stuffing something into a pocket of her knee length coat and mumbling what sounded like ‘*O, George, we’re in a bit of a pickle now.*’

In one corner squinted a man way past his prime, whose stained tee shirt stretched to breaking point over his swollen beer belly. He was lacking in both height and hair, at least on his scalp, for his flabby cheeks and squat chin were smattered in hoary whiskers. In the other corner was a ponytailed teenager who was oddly balanced ‘on point’ in satin flats. Even odder was the pink net tutu she wore over her super skinny jeans. Her hands fluttered on the ends of narrow wrists like a couple of captured butterflies. She seemed to be hyperventilating.

The phone holder was a fine boned young man with dreadlocks and eyes as blue as the pacific ocean on a windless day. He was kneeling on the floor in khaki pants and a shirt buttoned up to the collar. By his side lay a worn leather case in the shape of a miniature guitar.

'Well, my guess is,' he said eyeing the group, 'we're stuck between the second and third floors and we should...'

'There hath to be an emergenthy button,' butted in the fat old man. He began to frisk the walls.

'Do you mind,' snarled the thin woman on being pushed aside.

'Watch it fella,' growled the plump one, 'That's my buttock your poking. It's ok George, I'm unscathed.'

'Can't find the wretched thing,' the man grimaced, revealing he was also devoid of teeth. He banged the wall with his hands and then his shoes. 'Thereth's got to be a call button thumwhere.'

'Found it,' said the younger man, handing the phone to the thin woman so he could press the array of unlit buttons. 'Sorry, nothing. I guess we'll just have to wait for someone to come.'

'Hey, I know you, young man,' she said shining the light in his face, 'you're The Busker. You used to sit outside this building. I'd pass you on my way to the park with Sir Tibbet.'

The fat man's bristled face was thrust between them. 'Thir Tibbet? Who'th he?'

'My cat,' she says, brushing him aside.

A whimper and movement from the corner, grabs their attention. The Busker takes the phone and directs the light. The girl is pirouetting at great speed. Everyone else frowns.

'Oh I love cats, don't I George,' says the rotund woman. 'But I can't have one on account of me having a nursery.'

'You have a baby? At your age? Hah!' sniggered the fat man.

'A plant nursery. I grow potted plants on my balcony. Cat's tend to dig them up.'

'They're noxious weeds, Bethyl,' scoffed the thin woman, 'how many times do I have to tell you that.'

'They're endangered species, Arabella. George says so. Anyway people pay good money for my plants.'

'Like who?' queried the fat man, 'Who would pay good money for weedth?'

'He does,' she said pointing in the direction of The Busker.

The young man gave a shrug. 'It's true. She has quite a green thumb when it comes cultivating high quality hemp.'

'Is hemp a weed?' asked Arabella.

'Some would call it that,' he grins, and his perfect teeth glint in the brightness.

'So you're a craftsman,' says Arabella, 'That's refreshing to hear from...'

'Is that how you lost your fingerth?' interjected the fat man. 'From making fibre?'

Everyone looked at The Busker's left hand as it gripped the phone. The stubs of his fingers all stopped at the third knuckle.

'No,' he says without further comment, and removes a ukulele from the small case.

'Are you going to play us a song? George loves music,' Bethyl exclaimed.

'Who the hell ith George?' yelled the fat man. Spit formed in the corner of his mouth and he wiped it away with the hem of his shirt.

'My husband,' she sighed.

'You're not married Bethyl. You never have been,' scoffed the thin woman, 'so quit with the pretence.'

'I do have a husband,' shouted Bethyl.

The girl in the tutu bends her knees in a graceful plie. 'Please don't fight. I can't bear it.'

'Excute me thweety, do you want to be a ballerina when you grow up?' asked the fat man. 'Coth you're very talented.'

'I'm not a little girl,' she whined, rising again and clasping her hands above her head. 'I'm thirty-bloody-five!' She leapt sideways and then back again. 'If you must know, I had big dreams of success. But they were suddenly taken away from me.'

'I know what you mean,' grimaced The Busker, 'Does anyone have some cat gut? I need strings for my ukulele.'

Arabella began to cry, and her sobs ricocheted off every wall.

'What the hell,' blurted the fat man.

'It's Sir Tibbet. He was mutilated one dark night,' stage whispered Bethyl, 'He had to be put down.'

The old man's eyes widen. 'What did the cat look like? Before, I mean.'

'I have a photo,' sniffed Arabella opening her bag and searching its contents. 'Oh my God, my wallet is missing.' She turned to the chubby woman, 'Bethyl, hand it over.'

Bethyl shyly removed a purple wallet with an owl motif from her coat pocket, 'Sorry, I couldn't help it.' A small silver case slipped from the coat to the floor.

'My lighter,' gasped the fat man, 'You're a thief!'

'No I'm not. George says I have a condition. Its called kleptomania.'

'Thame thing,' grumbled the fat man pocketing his lighter.

'Here's Mr Tibbet.' Arabella wiped her eyes and passed around the photo. 'Wasn't he lovely? Why would anyone want to hurt him?'

'What long teeth he hath,' commented the fat man.

'Oh my, Oh my!' cried the young woman, leaping from one side of the lift to the other. 'It's him! It's him!'

'Who?' asked the fat man, trying to catch and hold her, but failing.

'The cat.' Leap. 'He's the one I tripped over,' leap, 'on my way to my first performance,' another leap, 'My career as a ballerina was ruined because of him.' Leap, plie, spin. 'I can't breathe!'

A sound resonated within the confined space. It was beautiful, heavenly, soothing. Every movement ceased, every heart eased, every mouth closed...except for one. The Busker sang and the tune was so beguiling that the rest of the group did not hear the words, only the melody. It was rich, smooth and magical.

It was a song about retribution. A song about payback, and the satisfaction of implementing an eye for an eye, or in this case, a paw for each finger bitten off by feline teeth.

The ballerina nodded knowingly towards The Busker and mouthed a 'thank you'.

His bright blue eyes sparkled and he winked back, just as a fluoro light flickered into life.

The elevator jerked and whirred, and resumed its journey upwards to the third floor.