

**GRETCHEN HAWKINS**

*Monday, 15 July 1985 – 3.11 pm*

Only moments ago, I had reinstated normal plumbing service in the toilets and had returned all manner of implements, each of unknown pedigree, to the utilities' cupboard, next to the discarded chalk board, at the rear of the Sidebottom Arms, when an explosion of unknown origin shakes the foundations of the building.

Unworthy though it may have been, my first thoughts were what a blessed relief it will be to have the Sidebottom Arms Hotel demolished by the gracious act of a compassionate God so that I might be relieved of its ongoing burden. But I recognise these thoughts as unsatisfactory the moment I have them and they are swiftly banished from my mind. In any event, I fear that even the Almighty honours a good ol' fashioned heritage-listing.

Raising the hem of my long skirt, I gallop from the darkness of the building, into the courtyard, towards the source of the sound, and I see an object hurtling from the heavens directly towards the wall which divides the courtyard from the street. The object, of unknown parentage, is as red as a London phone box and, upon a quick visual inspection, of apparently similar dimensions.

The final arc of its trajectory, however, will never enjoy a place in my memory because, by the time it smashed into the ground, I'd dived back through the arched doorway of the Sidebottom Arms Hotel and buried my face into the decrepit, foul-smelling, old rug in the foyer and placed my arms over my head.

But I find time to pray to that gracious God.

***JANELLE QUIGLEY***

*Monday, 15 July 1985 – 3.11 pm*

Ruth had to bolt, so I'm on me lonesome to clean up after the lunch crowd left. Which meant I'm in the front courtyard and, like, see the whole flamin' thing.

It was like that one time when Luke Skywalker blew up the Death Star. So excellent!

I may've dived under a table, but.

Don't tell no one, okay?

**MAYOR SALLY FREEMAN**

*Monday, 15 July 1985 – Afternoon Notes Part 1*

**Major Incident Notes**

Already having a bit of a day.

**Pickle #1** – Knocking back *The Saint*. Even though there was a time I would have gladly let him knock me up.

**Pickle #2** – Turning down entreaties from *The Fallen Kneecap*. Even though I wanted to scream, “c’mon, Wayne, turn it up!”

**Pickle # 3 [low importance]** – That stuck-up English cow, *To The Manor Forlorn!* Getting stuck up me. Over a bus stop. A bus stop I opposed in private session. At least until we actually have a bus, or two, to stop.

**Pickle #4 [immediate importance]** – Striding down the Sidebottom’s Reach pedestrian mall. Just after 3pm. Hastening towards the office of the *Sidebottom Siren*. To either maul or get mauled.

Suddenly, a crack of thunder erupts behind me. No warning. But it doesn’t sound like thunder.

Swinging around. Looking up. Towards the sky. Black objects flying in different directions, across the heavens. Big one heading toward McGinty Square. Getting larger and larger as it gets closer and closer.

I’m frozen. The object smashes into the ground. Beyond the buildings lining the mall.

I start running. I just start running.

Towards where the UFO crash-landed.

**JAYSON QUIGLEY**

*Monday, 15 July 1985 – 3.11 pm*

Me uncle 'n' me talks for a while over a schooner. Then he, like, invites me to join him in the park 'cross the effin' street. T'was a kinda ginger ale invitation. Very polite, like.

Uncle Crispin uses a lot of fanciful words but, basically, I'm effin' stuffed.

I was hopin' that me uncle could talk the lady Mayor 'round, but even though them two are meant to be effin' friends or some-think, he couldn't talk 'er 'round so, even though I was hopin' he could talk her 'round, so now I'm totally effin' stuffed. As stuffed as they effin' come.

I ask Uncle C-dog why I can't tell 'em that I've got an effin' medical condition. Urinary incompetence or some-think like dat. He reckons that's not what they call it, so I suggest me urine might be inclement and he reckons that's wrong too, so I don't effin' know.

Uncle Crispin says I should just cop to it and hope for a penalty reduction, 'cos if I don't cop to it, I might not get me penalty reduction and I, like, want a penalty reduction so I'd better just cop to it now rather than cop to it on the footsteps of the effin' court so I might get me penalty reduction. By then the horse might've been bolted in its yard, if ya knows what I mean.

He asks me why I done it and I tell 'im I don't effin' know why I done it, 'cos I was pissed out of me mind, and that's why I don't effin' know why I done it.

I remember watchin' that concert from the effin' UK, with Jacko and some other mates. The one, y'know, for the starvin' kids in effin' Africa or some place. And I guess I must've had a few 'cos I can't remember much after that. But I remember watchin' the effin' concert for the starvin' effin' kids in Africa.

But I guess at some effin' point I needed to take a slash, so I must've found some excluded place where I could, like, effin' whip it out and take a slash, and I must've seen a wall and thought that it looked like a good kinda place to take a slash and that's when I must've effin' whipped it out and, like, taken me effin' slash.

And that's when Jacko and me mates must've been eggin' me on and, like, effin' challengin' me to go higher and higher and that must've been when I started, like, trying to see if I could, like, hit the effin' window above the wall but I wouldn't have tried to hit the effin' window above the wall if Jacko and me mates hadn't started effin' eggin' me on.

And I wouldn't have, like, taken a slash where I done it if I knew it was the lady Mayor's effin' wall and the lady Mayor's effin' window, even though them pricks was, like, effin' eggin' me on and even though I only done it in the first effin' place 'cos they's were effin' eggin' me on.

Anyways, so me Uncle C-dog just, like, sighs and says he'll do the best he effin' can. But with my form I might be in some effin' trouble. Don't know why, but. It's like a human functionary, right? Ain't we all effin' human beans?

The C-dog sighs again and we both just, like, sit there starin' at the effin' river and there's, like, nothing more to be said so we might as well just effin' stare at the effin' river.

But then me C-dog just mutters that I'd better pray for an effin' miracle from God...

And just then there's like this boom and this flash of light and something comes flyin' down from the effin' sky, like a haemorrhoid or a meteor, or some-think, and it bursts into bits and one bit comes slashin' down towards us.

And I jump to me feet and I'm like, "what the effin' 'ell was dat! What the Jesus eff was dat?"

But then something hits me and effin' smashes me into the effin' ground and I just lie there and, like, groan in pain. I reckon I might be about to effin' die.

***CRISPIN McINTOSH***

*Monday, 15 July 1985 – 3.11 pm*

The winter sun's providing us with sufficient warmth as my nephew, Jayson Quigley, and I sit on the wooden bench towards the bottom of McGinty Square with a pleasing view of the Balmoral River below us, the paraphernalia left by the strap-boys notwithstanding.

There are some colonial buildings running along the northern side of the square to our left, including a rather grand brown brick building where a prominent pastoralist once lived. The Sidebottom Arms Hotel stands, like an ancient monument, at the crest of the rise, some fifty to one hundred metres behind us.

I use my left hand to rub my scalp as I proceed through several drafts in my head, before finally finding the words I wish to deploy.

"Jayson," I begin, "I met Mayor Freeman in conference, this morning, and I fear that the news is not good. Her worship is, I am afraid, against us on our petition for her to exercise her discretion and not refer you to the Sidebottom's Reach police."

"Ain't she, like, ya friend," Jayson grizzles. "Ain't that what you keep effin' tellin' everybody?"

"Um, yes," I pause before continuing, "the Mayor and I have enjoyed an association over the years, but I'm afraid she couldn't be swayed on this issue."

"Jesus effin' Christ!" Jayson explodes, "does dat mean I'm a goner? Can't I, like, say I've got me-self, y'know, like a medical disablement or some-think?"

"Only if it's the truth, young man," I reply.

My nephew leans forward on the park bench. His hands are positioned below his thighs. I can see his eyes darting, frantically, from left to right.

"I dunno, Uncle Crispin," Jayson bleats. "I think I may have a urinary incompetence or some-think like dat. Wouldn't dat explain what I done?"

"I don't believe there is any such condition," I caution.

"Maybe I got the name wrong," Jayson removes his hands from beneath his thighs and runs them through his unruly hair. "But I think me urine may be effin' inclement which is why I had to have a slash where I done it."

“Now, Jayson,” I intone. “I think the term you are looking for is neither incompetence nor inclemency but, rather, urinary incontinence. It’s your case and you can defend it any *truthful* way you want, but if you want to argue that, then remember this; you’ll need to find yourself another lawyer. Because whilst there are many things you are, there is one thing you are not, and that is incontinent.”

“I dunno, Uncle Crispin”, Jayson puts his head in his hands and laments, “I’m so bemuddled. I’m regrettable. I really am. I’m effin’ regrettable.”

I turn and examine my nephew. The look of resignation is obvious on his face. I pause to collect an errant thought and, once ready, I urge Jayson to plead guilty now and petition the court for a lighter sentence.

Then we sit in silence and gaze across the expanse of lawn to the buoyant river beyond.

“Jayson,” I murmur. “With your record, it may be wise to pray for some divine intervention.”

My words are immediately followed by a scalding, bright light which flashes across the western sky like a supernova followed, moments later, by a cracking sonic boom.

Jayson leaps to his feet in terror.

My eyes snap skywards and I see the disparate remnants of some former celestial body soaring across the sky in graceful, parabolic arcs as shoots of water might spray from a fountain.

I gasp when I see that one large piece of cosmic shrapnel is heading in our direction, getting larger and larger as it hurtles closer and closer. I rise to my feet and propel myself towards my nephew who, by this stage, has started to run. I knock the wind out of both him and me, but I’m able to wrestle him to the ground and lie across his body, protecting him, as best I can, from the threat which is careening down from the sky.

And I hold my breath. Waiting to die.

All I can hear is a wooshing sound. Everything else is silent. Other than my own breathing. And Jayson groaning.

Then comes the crash.

I hear the agonising sound of metal crashing into asphalt and brick, followed by the sizzling and crackling which reminds me of the bonfire my father used to build each June long weekend.

And then comes the rancid odour. Like burning tyres. And death.

Suddenly I'm running. As fast as I can. Towards the crash site.

There are clouds of billowing smoke and dust and grime impeding my vision. But I wave my arms and I cough and I press forward, ever forward.