

# THE LIFT

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Cover Illustration by Faramond Frie

## ONE

Polly was late for work. Everything had been going wrong. She had slept through her alarm this morning. How could that happen? She felt grimy, because in all the rush she hadn't time to shower. She had laddered her tights, snagged on something on the tube. She had had to stand the whole way from Holborn.

Now she was waiting for the lift at her office building on Canary Wharf. A magnificent building that rose into the sky, floor upon floor, as it dominated this part of the London horizon. She was involved in the most bizarre of conversations.

"Believe me lady, you don't want to catch this lift."

"Yes. I do."

"No Ma'am," replied the smaller, compactor of the two, "not now, not this lift."

"But this is my lift, I work here."

"Not this lift Ma'am, try later, or that one over there."

Polly wanted to scream, but she was still holding it together.

"Listen to me. This is my lift. I catch it everyday. I am very late. I am catching this lift."

"Can't let you do that Ma'am."

"And stop calling me Ma'am. Are you Americans?" she asked exasperatedly.

"No Ma'am, we are adventurers."

Polly paused for thought. They were two of the weirdest guys she had seen in a long time. It wasn't the brightly coloured hair and beards or the alchemical symbols tattooed on their faces. It was their costumes. Like two guys from a SWAT team, but tie dyed instead of camouflage. Perhaps that was their camouflage. Both men carried large holdalls.

"Gentlemen, I am catching this lift."

"Okay Ma'am," replied the smaller, who now accepting that the persistent woman was going to share their ride, had introduced himself as Walter. "And this is André," he indicated his larger companion.

"Like the giant."

"Yes, like the giant."

"Weird," she muttered to herself, "who are these nutters?"

"Not nutters Ma'am," said André in a voice that was decidedly silken for a man of his stature, "adventurers."

"Adventurers with supersonic hearing?" she muttered again embarrassedly.

"Yes Ma'am, it comes in handy."

"On adventures?"

"Yes Ma'am, on adventures."

Polly was saved from any more of this whack job conversation by the ding of the bell. The lift doors whispered open.

Standing either side of the door, the two mismatched,

but identically dressed men bowed their heads and held out an arm inviting her to enter first. With a few unexpected butterflies in her stomach Polly stepped into the lift.

"I tell you what Ma'am," said Walter smoothly, "we'll even let you choose the button."

"These guys are nutters," thought Polly to herself, but out loud said, "it will be one hundred and four, that's my floor."

André turned to Walter and said in his silken voice, as if Polly wasn't there, "Why is this girl so rude?" To Polly he spoke nicely and slowly, as if explaining to a two year old, "this morning, this lift, this trip, is different. We don't care which button you press. It's like your Alice."

"My Alice," replied Polly now thoroughly confused.

"Yes, your Alice, through the looking glass."

Polly realised he was referring to one of her favourite childhood books.

"How is it like my Alice?" she asked confused.

This time it was Walter that spoke. They were like a double act.

"When she is in the corridor of a thousand doors it doesn't matter which one she goes through. It will be great. You are introducing an element of random spontaneity. I just normally close my eyes and press a button."

"These guys are nutters," thought Polly. She imagined the shock on the trading floor when these two weirdos stepped out of the lift.

"You just don't get it," continued Walter, "and stop calling us nutters, we do have feelings you know."

Polly just hung there in shock. "Are they reading my thoughts?"

"Yes," came the silent reply, "get used to it."

Polly didn't know whether to laugh or scream. This building had the fastest lift in London. She should have arrived at her floor ages ago. With all the weirdness she hadn't noticed.

"We tried to warn you," the two men spoke together, musically, in harmony, like half of a barber shop quartet.

Simultaneously the two men reached down to their hold-alls, pulled the zips and started removing and then attaching an assortment of weapons to themselves. Knives were strapped to calves, belts and concealed in sleeves. Grenade like things were clipped to jackets and a collection of guns were held and strapped about their two persons.

"Ready?"

"Yep, ready."

"My God," squeaked Polly, now truly terrified, "are you terrorists?"

"No Ma'am," came the harmonious reply, "we already gone and told you, we are adventurers," and with that André handed her a strange looking pistol. "It's pretty simple, just point, pull the trigger and move on."

And with that, there was a loud ding, and the lift doors opened to reveal a flock of huge winged things tearing at a huge writhing Leviathan and with a shove in her back Polly stumbled into the nightmare.

## TWO

"You did well Ma'am."

"If I did so goddamn well can I please graduate from Ma'am to Polly?"

"She did say please Walter," said André, "and she's more polite, hasn't called us nutters for a while"

"Yes, okay," muttered Walter, "you are right, Polly it is."

They were sitting around a fire in a cave in a forest. The cave was warm and dry and André had told her it was safe. She trusted André. Today, if you could call it a day, was the best day of her life.

They had come through into some kind of alien landscape. Polly knew it was alien because none of the creatures in front of her existed in the records of the Natural History museum or even in her worst nightmares. The twin Suns in the sky were also a bit of a giveaway.

A terrible keening wail broke out from the flock. A dozen heads smeared with steaming guts pulled from the jerking body and held the trio with laser like fixation. Almost as one they launched.

Polly didn't even think. She held her pistol in front of

her and squeezed the trigger. An explosion of meat mid-air caught her conscious thought for a fraction of a second before she was shooting again. Polly was aware of Walter and André firing beside her and the sky was full of exploding monsters.

Polly jumped a little. In the unnaturally calm that existed, with ears humming from the concussions, a large hand patted her on the shoulder.

"Way to go Ma'am," and that was that.

She hoped they didn't notice the silent tear trickle down her cheek when Walter snapped the heels off her Jimmy Choo's, but as he so accurately observed, she wasn't exactly kitted out for this kind of adventuring.

## THREE

"What do you mean, how does it work? It works."

"What we don't get crushed by hyper-gravity, or breathe an atmosphere of sulphuric acid?"

"Not so far."

"Well that's ridiculous, impossible," said Polly, throwing the bone into the fire.

It was the best meal she had ever tasted, but she realised that owed more to her unlikely survival of multiple "adventures" today, than the quality of the meat or the chef's culinary skills. Not that Walter hadn't made a fine meal for them all.

"So, did you make the lift?"

"No Ma'am, sorry Polly," apologised Walter.

"But you're not human?"

"Define human?"

"Well generally being human doesn't come with the ability to converse psychically."

"Ah," hummed André, joining the conversation, "well, we are evolved."

"What from the future?"

André reached forward to take a piece of meat from the spit, and turning to Walter, said, "you gotta admit Walter, this Girl is pretty sharp."

Despite the compliment, Polly bristled at having slipped down the pole from Ma'am to Girl, but decided, to let it go.

"Well I sure am grateful for you two boys saving my bacon today," but looking at their good-natured faces, she could see that she was wasting her time. Not all of André's pouches held grenades and reaching over she picked up another can of Coors and pulled the ring contentedly.

## FOUR

A light tap on her ankle brought Polly instantly alert.

"Hostiles."

"I thought you said it was safe?" she mentally whispered into the pitch black.

"Things change."

Her perspective on missing her shower "yesterday morning" had changed somewhat. Yesterday she had trudged through stinking marshes, been covered in gore and blood, eaten some of their hunters, and now slept in a cave full of smoke with two strange men. Her designer dress was stained and ripped and was held in place as much by mud and stale sweat. All of this barely touched her consciousness as her hand felt the smooth stock of her new best friend and her finger caressed the trigger.

"Okay, let's go."

Polly was surprised how well she could see in the pitch-black cave. Her ears too were incredibly acute. Then she heard it. A slight slobber and wet rasp as something dragged itself on rock. The sound seemed to come from all around her. Lying on her back holding the pistol in both hands, she

vainly stared up at the empty space above. That's when the huge dollop of slime landed on her face.

The gun in her hand exploded upwards with a volley of shots. There was a wet gasp, a moment of silence, and then all the breath went out of her as the massive corpse dropped from the roof of the cavern, and wetly and foully half crushed, half drowned her.

Polly opened her eyes. The bright light of the lift was broken by the concerned faces of Walter and André crouching over her.

"She's okay," they said simultaneously in their harmonious tones. And she was, Polly Granger was really okay.

## FIVE

Polly woke up with the sun streaming through the blinds of her apartment. She had had the most incredible dream. She felt dreadful though. Her head hurt, her sinuses were blocked, and she ached all over. Perhaps she had flu. She would phone in and take the day off.

She got her legs carefully out from under the silk duvet and planted them firmly on the bedroom floor. Yuk, what had she put her feet on! Looking down she saw the remains of the stinking, slimy, filthy dress, she had bought in that little boutique in Chelsea. The "dream" all came back to her and with an involuntary yelp she curled up tight under the covers.

## SIX

They met in a cafe on the Kings Road. Polly ordered a cappuccino, an almond croissant, and wove her way over to where Walter and André were already sitting.

"How's the head?" Walter offered without preamble.

"Fine."

"What was she doing here?" she asked herself as she slid into the comfy couch.

"Because we invited you," came the reply, "and you have discovered you have hidden talents."

Polly blushed, but held Walter's gaze with a hard stare. "It's rude to invade my privacy like that."

Walter met her gaze for a few seconds before looking away.

"You're right, sorry. It's just that you are broadcasting like a beacon. We were trained as kids to differentiate between private and universal. I guess you don't have that."

"Can you teach me?"

"I guess so," replied Walter warily. "Is it worth the effort?"

"The effort?"

"Well it's only us."

"I'll teach you Polly," cut in André.

"Why thank you André," Polly smiled.

"Can we cut to the chase?"

"And what exactly is the chase?"

"Polly you are good. With a bit of training you could be brilliant. We would like you to join us. We would like you to be an adventurer."

## SEVEN

The first room was a high-end shooting range deep underground in the West End. Polly had been around enough to know that access to, these kind of executive facilities, was not given to one and all. She said as much to Walter.

"We pulled in a favour or two. Our particular talents are well appreciated in certain influential circles."

Polly didn't care. She was having a great time. Night and day were a blur down here. She seemed to spend all her time mastering the art of pistol shooting, along with a variety of guns, some which would be recognised on the street, and some out of the pages of fevered minds.

The snooker hall was next, or to be totally accurate, ex snooker hall.

Here, she spent time with André, mastering the art of combat with and without weapons. She learnt that anything could be utilised as a weapon. A paper cup. A girl's hair ribbon.

A particular favourite was a short doubled edged blade, but she loved them all. André had told her she had a real gift for the crossbow, but it was the guns she loved. Walter

and André both said ladies, they knew better than to say girls, were the best shots. Something to do with lack of ego. They didn't have anything to prove, just exercised their talent. Polly, apparently, was a natural. Her grouping was consistently brilliant and whether pistol or assault rifle she was formidably accurate, fast and smooth. They already knew she could function under pressure, even without any training.

There were certain benefits too. Polly hadn't worked since her first adventure. Walter and André had insisted she took a serious bank transfer, so she could concentrate on her training. Adventures weren't all to monster infested wastelands. Sometimes adventures were sources of abundance.

She had loved her job in Docklands and was quite sad when she told her boss she was leaving for personal reasons. He had even offered her a raise to stay. It was nice to be appreciated.

Walter, Polly and André were having dinner at a charming little restaurant in Islington. Very unpretentious, with excellent food and good service. Fun and friendly, it was one of her favourites.

Who should walk in the door, but Phillip, her ex-boyfriend from two years ago, with a bunch of mates. Phillip hadn't been a gentleman, in fact he had treated her badly and she wasn't pleased to see him.

He saw her straight away and sauntered over in that cocky self-assured way she remembered so well.

"Hello, Polly," the syllables drawn out and over loud. For the first time he seemed to notice Walter and André, but still seemed confident and brash. "Who are your friends? Your new Fan Club?"

Polly looked him straight in the eyes. Her smile was

lovely but her eyes hard and cold. "Phillip, I don't want to talk to you, please go away."

Phillip was confused. He had always dominated Polly. He liked to humiliate her in front of his friends and slap her around in private. However, even a bully as arrogant and insensitive as Phillip could sense all was not as it should be. Still his mates were watching. He reached forward and put his hand roughly on her shoulder and hissed "be nice bitch."

Both Walter and André had stood up, but André's tuition had been very thorough. With a fluid motion, Polly rose as if to embrace Phillip placing her hands on the sides of his head where she drove her thumb nails into the lobes of his ears, crushing them against the sides of his skull. Phillip screamed like a child as he dropped to his knees in pain. Like all bullies he could dish it out but struggled to take it.

The restaurant was silent now except for Phillip's squeals and profanities.

A silken voice by her side spoke, filling the silent restaurant with its rich timbre, "You heard the lady, she doesn't want to talk to you."

Polly released her grip and the humiliated bully knelt in front of her like a supplicant, holding his agonised ears. Walter who had been watching the friends, indicated with a nod, that they should take their buddy, and leave.

Polly straightened her dress and sat down smiling as a ripple of applause pealed out from the other diners.

"Friend of yours?" asked André, raising his glass in a mock salute.

"Never seen him before in my life," replied Polly with a smile.

## EIGHT

Polly was surprisingly pleased to see someone she knew. She was stood by the lift with Walter and André. If anything, her addition made them look even odder. André was something of a giant, and Walter was small and stocky but both of them were hard looking men. Polly was slight, and rather out of place. They were all dressed identically in the tie dye SWAT gear, which identified them as a team, and added to the bizarreness of it all. Three large holdalls rested tidily by the lift doors.

It was Andrea from accounts who stared unbelieving at Polly.

"Polly it is you?"

"Hello Andrea, you are early."

It had been Polly's idea to come early to avoid this very kind of thing. There were slots of time when the lift became a transporter. Polly couldn't imagine what happened to any poor sod who took the lift during these seemingly random moments.

"Yes, Mr Theatcher gave me a load of invoices to process, and they have to be out by lunch time."

"But Andrea, it's four am!"

"I know, I know, but you know what he's like."

Unfortunately, Polly did know what he was like and sympathised.

"What happened to you Polly? You just disappeared with some rumour of personal problems."

For the first time she looked Polly up and down and her two companions. "And what in God's name are you wearing? You look like you've left Vietnam and morphed into hippies."

To be fair, Polly was feminine. Normally to be seen in the latest Paris fashions, with her hair cut by Spyros or Luigi at their Mayfair salon. Now she looked tough and fit, and although her hair was clean and sparkled, it was tied back in a simple pony tail.

All this time Walter and André had stood like disembodied mutes.

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your friends?"

However, at that moment Polly was rescued by the polite ding of the arriving lift, whose doors silently opened. She leant forward giving Andrea a slight peck on the cheek.

"Lovely to see you darling, we must meet for lunch," and with that she picked up her heavy holdall and the three of them were gone.

## NINE

When the lift doors opened in to a smart lobby, for the first second Polly thought the lift hadn't worked. Walter had asked her for a random number between one and fifty and she had picked her age.

On the back wall was a reception desk, and Polly gulped when she saw the thing "manning" the desk. It was tall, well dressed and had a purplish face covered with little waving tubes that whistled melodically. Polly wasn't aware of speaking "whistle," but she clearly understood the question, "can I help you please?"

Polly started to panic and turned back to re-enter the lift, but was stopped short, by a purple hand on her arm, and her reflection in the mirror on the lift wall. It was the same tie dye camo-gear but her face looked like it would be happier on a coral reef and Polly's heart skipped a beat.

"Keep it together Polly," whispered in her mind. "This is a moment for calm, rational thought, and diplomacy."

Polly was fighting the urge to scream, but remembering André's lessons, she took a deep breath in, a long exhale,

and turning around, stepped with her two companions back into the lobby.

## MORE BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jhedron Luckspar is a writer of Science Fiction stories and books.

Jhed has been busy working on the Friendship Series. Three Novels, “Revenge Of The Hrym,” “The Adventures Of Miss Ann Thrope,” and “Beano Grigio.” He is currently working on book four, as yet untitled.

Jhed has recently finished a children’s fantasy book which he is publishing with the Illustrator, Faramond Frie. They have already started work on it’s sequel.

“Equations of Being” is Jhed’s collection of short stories.

Jhed is lucky to have some excellent friends who enrich his life experience and he lives in a small village in the Cotswolds.

His life is further enriched by travel, music and sharing good food with said friends.

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