

Umbrella

It was a cloudy night; the darkness covered the city like a thick blanket. The wind blew gusts of air smelling of car fumes through the streets; it sneaked under the cracks of doors and whispered down sooty chimneys.

Mr Bell hurried down a dark street, holding onto his bowler hat so that the harsh breeze couldn't steal it. The wind blew harder, almost blowing the short, stout man off-course. Eyes narrowed, Mr Bell tried again to walk into the path of the determined gale. A hazy drizzle of misty rain drifted down in sheets, making him shiver and cough. Cursing the cold, he drew his coat tighter around his large figure. As he made to clamp his hat to his head again, he spotted something black and flapping on the pavement. An umbrella!

His heart leapt; the umbrella would be perfect! Feeling pleased with himself, Mr Bell ran towards it and snatched it up. The handle was smooth and glossy, and the waterproof dome was black and very large.

As Mr Bell raised it above his head, something remarkable happened. He began to feel lighter as he ran over the cobbled street, holding tight. Lighter and lighter. With a gasp, he realised that his leather shoes were no longer making contact with the pavement. He was flying! The wind lifted him up like hundreds of hands, all pushing upwards.

With a delighted and shocked shout, Mr Bell gazed down at the sprawling city below him. The streetlamps looked like beautiful, luminous flowers reaching up to him. Cars reminded him of jewel-coloured beetles crawling through the concrete maze.

The wind led him towards the park; it was the only splash of green in a grey ocean of buildings and roads. Clutching the umbrella tightly, he drifted towards two bronze statues of lions guarding the park entrance. Mr Bell outstretched his free hand and reached towards one. As he passed, he patted it on its cold head. The lion roared deeply and shook its impressive mane, whilst watching the small man float past.

Wide-eyed, Mr Bell swung himself away. The umbrella swayed dangerously and though he tried to adjust his grip, he felt his fingers slipping from the polished handle. For a moment, everything seemed to stop. It was as though he was looking down on himself, watching as his grip failed him. "This is it then," he thought.

Suddenly, time sped back up. He was falling. An ear-splitting scream escaped his lips. Limbs were flailing in all directions. He couldn't think – not about anything other than his impending doom anyway. The cars that no so long ago had reminded him of beetles, were getting bigger. Much bigger. He squeezed his eyes shut, sure that any moment now he would meet the ground.

What Mr. Bell didn't know was that the umbrella was hovering above him, waiting to take him on his journey again. It was quite the magical item! The problem was, it couldn't slot itself into Mr Bell's hands because they were violently thrashing through the air. At that moment, Mr. Bell stilled just enough for the umbrella to make itself known. The terrified man grabbed at it, frantic. As he felt the glossy handle take its place in his palm, he chanced a look

down. Moments away from mortality. As he grasped the handle harder, he waited dizzily for the world to stop spinning.

Still the wind carried him on. The trees swayed in time with the umbrella as he drifted higher again. A white barn owl flew past Mr Bell like a winged ghost. He was positive his face must be whiter than the owl.

As he rose, he scanned the sprawling city for his house – desperate to reach the security of home. There. He gently coaxed the umbrella down towards his street. The wind rushed down and with a bump, Mr Bell landed outside his house. He looked around to check that nobody had noticed him disembarking, before shakily making his way up the garden path. The promise of light and warmth beckoned him inside. As he stood on the front porch, he folded the umbrella up and smiled, relieved that this wasn't his last night on Earth. As he climbed the steps, he thought about what an exciting bedtime story his daughters would have that night...maybe he'd leave out the part of his near death experience though.