



FLY HIM DEATH'S POVERTY

PLEASED TO MEET YOU. HOPE YOU GUESSED MY NAME.

— **ADRIAN DAWSON** —

FLY HIM DEATH'S POVERTY

© ADRIAN DAWSON

Once you've achieved all you were ever set to achieve in this world, once you have done all that you were destined to do and you are looking for something to fill the dark void which will undoubtedly follow, I am sure that you would see my profession as a desirable one; glamorous perhaps. True, I choose my own hours, I travel the world and possess an almost limitless expense account, but for once I would like you to take just a moment of your time to see things from my perspective...

During my time in this job there is almost nowhere on the planet in which I have not spent at least a little time; from Washington D.C. to St. Petersburg, Russia. From Europe to The Middle East. I have visited endless deserts of sand and snow, climbed high mountains and sailed not only the Seven Seas, but also each and all of its smaller cousins.

Therein lies but one of my problems...

I would like you to take a moment to think of all the places that you always promised yourself that you would visit; all the things that you had hoped to see during your time on earth. I have seen them. All the stunning locations whose blue-skied, clear-watered or green-ensconced valleys have caught your eye. I have seen those too. Your dream might be to climb the steps to the marbled temples built in honour of Buddha or The Sun King, or you might prefer the glass and concrete temples built to honour the capitalist gods. Perhaps the neon which pays twenty-four hour respect to greed in Las Vegas or Atlantic City is more your thing. Whatever those places are that you know - you just know - you will get to see before your time is up...

I have seen them all.

The first time, without exception, I felt wonder. Before long, the only thing I wondered is when I might be released from this recurring and spiralling hell.

Without so much as a single exception.

You might not believe me; you might even choose to put my wild claims to the test by throwing a list of wild obscurities my way in the hope of catching me out. You won't. I really have seen every place on the face of this earth.

Consider this.... Once you have seen everything in this world and whilst daily space travel is still more comfortable adorning the pages of fiction, what else is there to see?

Emotion; I've seen every member of that family tree also. Fear, acceptance, shock and even a warm greeting. All have played out before my eyes like lotto numbers, each making random yet regular appearances from a desperately limited store. None have influenced the outcome. None have twisted fate.

Which leads me nicely, I feel, to the second of my problems.

The sheer, utter, mind-crucifying boredom.

Every job you can think of bears the clinging stigma of boredom; in varying measure I will grant you, but it is always an inescapable undercurrent to our lives. You might always have dreamt of becoming an actor, for example - perhaps even to elevate yourself to the title of movie star. It sounds fantastic, certainly, and I am sure that there are one hell of a lot of remarkable highs within such a calling to keep the balance firmly in favour of preventing you from returning to the checkout

counter at the local Mini-Mart. But... did you ever consider the interminable hours spent waiting on a cold and dreary set whilst the lighting is fixed or the electricians spend yet another three hours re-routing cables? Did you consider that you would have to attend a series of post-opening interviews, whether you liked it or not, and answer the same conveyor of sycophantic questions over and over from the same conveyor of sycophantic interviewers?

What if one day this great movie star that you have suddenly become was to become unwell? Not a life-threatening illness, you understand, but just a little under the weather? Think they're going to halt a fifty million dollar production because you feel lethargic or your head is pounding from a few too many glasses of celebratory champagne the night before?

Think again, my friend, think again.

So... how about becoming a rock star... now there's a good one. On stage in front of 250,000 screaming fans (screaming for YOU, I might add), but please don't tell me that the twenty-two hours you spend on the bus between gigs (or the plane, but we will come to that in more detail a little later) could actually be classed as fun.

They say that every hotel room looks the same. Me? I know damn well that they do. Same paint, same wallpaper, beds and linen. The same brand of soap in different packaging and the same mini-sachets of coffee and cream. Even that same one-drawer/one-cupboard bedside addition from which Gideon has tried so unsuccessfully to spread his word looks the same in spite of the varied materials I have seen employed in its construction. I travel so much that I cannot remember the last time I visited my own home. Yes, I do have one. There is a balance between excitement and monotony in all professions, but trust me... an unhealthy degree of sheer boredom exists even in the most glamorous and well-lit corners of the world.

The events surrounding my client visits have undoubtedly been extensive and eventful, though the novelty of such is also long-since eroded. I have visited my clients in the midst of war-torn nations, ducking as bullets flew like snowflakes. Others I had met in wondrous skyscrapers at the heart of those capitalistic cities I described earlier. Once I even paid a call upon a lady as the building in which she conducted her business burned like a dry tree to the ground, thick smoke adding weight to my task.

At the other end of the scale, one of my elder male clients lived alone, housed reclusively in a snow-covered cabin so far north that winter could only be measured in years. My arrival that evening was greeted by no other sound than that of a lone wolf howling, no doubt signalling to the rest of his pack that the only food available for miles had just walked purposefully into view and was wearing the kind of highly-priced snow fatigues that bore the just purchased scent of 'ill-prepared tourist' all over them. Of the pack of eight wolves, six became clients before a half hour had been and gone.

So it is not that I am stuck in the same place, meeting the same people - although they are all 'of a breed' - but rather it is that I have seen all the places and met all the people. As such, nothing in this desperately elongated life I am cursed to live seems capable of taking me by welcome surprise any more.

When my daughter was conceived that came as a surprise. My fortieth birthday party was a surprise also - the event, of course, not the date.

I love surprises.

I miss them.

I hinted at flying a moment ago. Nowadays, since air travel has become as easy as hopping on a bus I will not deny that the work I do has become infinitely easier to complete within the stringent deadlines I set myself, but if I have to eat one more pre-packaged, de-hydrated and partially reconstituted plastic tray of faux nutrition, I swear I'll.....

You get the picture.

In the 'old days', and I have been doing this for quite some time now, I traversed the globe as best I could and I will not insult your intelligence by telling you that reaching all my clients in time was an easy task. Sometimes it was almost inconceivably difficult to find passage from one continent to the next - although having such healthy sums of money at my disposal always seemed to ease the burden of transport. Nowadays, it seems, so much that I gleaned from those 'bygone' days is missing. I miss the simplicity of life - the unpredictability that came hand-in-hand with a complete lack of information - something which sweeps across the face of the earth faster now than I am capable of blinking my tired eyes.

Also, from the 'dark days' (as some would have us refer to them) I remember innumerate instances where I might be en-route to perform my duties, usually falling well behind whatever ill advised itinerary I had created for myself, and I would happen upon either a group or an individual to whom I could suddenly introduce myself, as it had been with the wolves. Such unexpected occurrences were dark pleasures, certainly, but pleasures all the same.

They are increasingly few and far between in the modern world.

So what of today, you ask? This particular moment in time? Where am I? Where is it that I am travelling to and what will I do when I get there?

Well, at the instant I write this I am sitting on yet another plane - another 747-A, no great surprise there - en-route from Chicago O'Hare to Paris. From there I will catch a connecting flight (probably a 737) to Marseilles. Then, at 8.37pm tomorrow evening (GMT +1) I will meet my guest, a merchant banker by the name of Jacques Flavée. Monsieur Merchant will have himself a heart attack as he leers and drools and attempts to spill his blackened seed over his third male pre-teen conquest of the month. By 8.38pm he will be dead, his eyes open wide for the first time in his forty-six years of depravity. I have met a million like him before and there will be a million like him to follow over many more tedious years than I care to hazard a guess at.

I am flying first class - would you expect anything less of a man in my position? - and the seat is as you would imagine... comfortable and allowing a little more legroom than those seated in steerage some way behind me. I am still aware, however, that my extremities will ache by the time I arrive. Both journey and arrival will (yet again) be predictable and tiresome.

Comfort is always balanced out to cost with airlines and so this is no Rockwell Recliner into which I have sunk my butt. The air - the filthy re-packaged air - is the same mix of gases that has already passed through the lungs of almost every passenger on board.

Some will meet me in person soon enough. I can taste it.

The above itinerary for Monsieur Flavée is, of course, assuming that the schedules of the relevant airlines are adhered to rigidly, and that is by no means a given in my experience.

The truth of what I am trying to explain to you - of why I am pouring out a soul I no longer possess - is that I tire endlessly of my current employment, yet I'm unable to change what it is that I do. Like you, perhaps, I yearn for the good old days before technology speeded up the world and left me with extra time in which to kick my heels and chew my nails in yet another magnolia-bland hotel room watching re-runs of 'America's Funniest Home Videos' or some Continental Channel

whose language I might understand but whose humour I do not – despite, I believe, having a darker sense of humour than most.

I have read every line of every book on the planet; seen every movie (in-flight or otherwise) and heard every piece of music and poetry ever created by the hands, hearts and minds of man. Most of them I have even heard in a live setting, performed by none other than the original artists.

You will not be surprised when I tell you then that the boredom I suffer on a daily basis is excruciating. I feel it not just in my heavy heart, if indeed I possess one, but also throughout every tingling nerve in my body. It crawls over my skin like a myriad tiny insects and drips into my mind like a leaking tap. This is not the kind of monotony which I can balance out with dreams of how I will entertain myself when I get my statutory three weeks' leave either, because my task is truly endless; 24-7-365. Nor is it one that I can sustain hope will be eased tomorrow, or the day after, when my life might take an unexpected swerve into an unpredicted dimension. My life, unlike yours, will never - can never - divert from the tracks onto which its ever-turning wheels have been placed. Relentlessly mundane as it is, this is what I do. It is what I have done for almost as long as my memory will take me and whilst I might wish for it daily I can see no end to my services being required.

So what is it that I do, you ask? What is my vocation? Perhaps you have even taken a moment to yourself whilst reading my story thus far to hazard your very first guess.

Please allow me to introduce myself...

I dare say that the fact that the word 'Death' appears in the title of this story, added to my reference to the imminent demise of Monsieur Flavée, may have set you on a particular train of thought, but let me assure you... I am no killer. Never once have I taken the life of another individual, justified or otherwise. Which is not to say that death does not follow in my wake, or that any of the people to whom I introduce myself are alive at the point at which I bid them farewell. Such truths, however, do not make me a murderer. Indeed, the people I called to meet are, by and large, their own killers. My task is merely to welcome them to the other side.

Yes, the other side of the other side. The wrong side.

I titled my memorandum to you 'Fly Him Death's Poverty' for two distinct reasons...

The first is that I am, in many respects, 'Death' (and how do you do?) and yes, to perform my duties I do indeed fly almost everywhere I can. These days, at any rate. On arrival at my location I also bring with me the ultimate in 'poverty' – not just the loss of wealth, of love or of spirit – but the ultimate loss – the loss of all things. I see a red door, a bold statement of a bright future and, you guessed it... I want to paint it black.

I truly envy my clients. At least they have the uncertainty - the excitement, if you will - that comes with the end of their lives, so rarely predicted. For my sins, too long ago to remember, I will never die. I cannot die, not when so many new clients are being born to me with every waking day.

It is not even as if this world offers any inventive iniquities with which to enliven but one of my interminable meetings. They say that Adam committed the only truly original sin and they were right. Trust me; it really has been one long downhill race ever since.

I have no tools of my trade save for my own foreboding presence (and if you ever met me, then I can assure you that you would quickly understand just how literally I mean that). I certainly do not carry a scythe (just how clichéd do you wish me to be), and nor do I wear a long black cloak with an infinitely dark recess of a hood from which my reddened eyes might glint like the final rubies of

breath. No, personally I tend to favour Armani, Hugo Boss and - on my more casual days - Tommy Hilfiger or Nike. I wear an expensive aftershave, the scent from which seems to form a pleasant alliance with my natural body oils and I sport an expensive - though by no means pretentious - Breitling watch. Ironically, I suppose, I like to think I am 'a man of wealth and taste', and whilst my eyes might not be rubies on this particular Tuesday, I can assure you that no-one who ever looks into those dark, oily pools will ever forget them. Certainly not until they cease to draw breath (though if you ponder the timescales involved then that's hardly as prestigious a boast as it sounds, now is it?).

My general appearance is that of two very distinct things; the guy next door and the Angel of Death. This is because, despite any preconceptions you may have gleaned from pulp magazines and trashy movies, Death looks nothing like you expect him to look. Not until you meet him. The look on every single one of my client's faces; the horrific realisation of something that is both inevitable and inescapable, tells me that they know exactly who I am, long before I open my mouth and, in as silky a voice as I can draw - a combination of the warmest tones imaginable and the coldest breath they will ever feel brush against the prickling electricity of their skin - introduce myself. I am inevitable. I am a rolling stone and I gather no moss.

The second reason I titled my story in the quirky way that I did is that I was, yet again, bored. I had a little pen and a lot of time. So I started to play with my words as many others on the flight seemed want to play with their food. So 'Fly Him Death's Poverty' is an anagram - a wordplay derived from the letters of the only song title I ever took to be truly written for me. To quote its all-encompassing lyrics I have indeed been around 'many a long, long year' and 'stolen many a man's soul and faith'. I would also like to think that by reading this story you have come to understand a little of what my existence is like, and perhaps even felt the merest twinge of sympathy for the fatuousness of my ceaseless task.

The song... my song.... 'Sympathy for The Devil.'

Which is why I close my story by offering my most heartfelt thanks to Messrs. Jagger and Richards who, within that same song, furnished me with a more befitting introduction than I could ever have created for myself. The 'killer opening line', if you will pardon the pun, that seemed to have eluded me for the first few thousand years or so of my working life. It is the kind of 'Bond... James Bond' initiation that really does seem to suit my particular vocation, and it has become the line that I now deliver without fail - and with irreverent pride - to every wretched, dying soul on whom I have been asked to call. Not only to let them know that their time on this earth is at an end, but also to alert them to the direction in which they will be travelling when they reach the other side...

Remember the line and take heed, dear friend, because I might just be that little bit closer than you think. Look up from this story and I might prove to be the smartly-dressed gentleman sitting in the first class seat next to you; or the man standing idly across the street from your apartment. I may have passed you in the street or passed the salt to you in the diner. Even if I have not, even if we have yet to share a glance, then do not take that as grounds for a relaxation of who you really ought to be. One dark day which you cannot possibly hope to foresee I might still come a-knocking on your door or bump into you, seemingly accidentally, in a crowded city street. Whilst the events that drive my existence are banal in the extreme, there are only two constants that I can guarantee for you. The first is that my arrival will be at the point you least expect it, and the second is that you will know who I am in the instant you see my face.

Long before I get around to introducing myself in person...

"Pleased to meet you. Hope you guessed my name."