

Fluke: A Short Story [C1]

Una storia dall'umorismo cupo che racconta come l'ossessione per l'arrampicata porti a una serie di incidenti sempre più bizzarri e pericolosi.

The lancet **liver fluke** is a microscopic parasitic **flatworm** that turns ants into zombies. An ant accidentally eats a **fluke** and the parasite migrates to the ant's brain where it heads to the central nervous system and takes control. The **fluke** causes the infected ant **to climb** to the top of a **blade of grass** and **perch** there, dreamily awaiting its death. When **cattle** or **sheep** come **to graze**, they eat the grass together with the ant, and the **fluke** worm settles into the larger animal's **liver**, doing terrible damage. A few months ago, I became convinced that one of these tiny demon parasites had migrated to the brain of my best friend, Pete. This was my second hypothesis. My first was that he was the subject of the other type of **fluke**. When he fell off a **ladder** while painting his bedroom **ceiling**, I thought he'd been **clumsy**. When the very same week he fell out of a tree in his garden while trying to rescue his cat, I joked: "Third time lucky, eh, Pete?" The third time happened just five days later. Rather than call the maintenance people, Pete decided to walk out onto his **roof** with a **mop** and **bucket** to clean his solar panels. The wet panels were very **slippery**. Pete **missed his footing**, fell and **slithered** uncontrollably off the **roof** into the branches of the same tree the cat had got stuck in. That was the first time I mentioned the word '**fluke**' — not as in a parasitic worm, but as in an unlikely **chance occurrence**, or a surprising piece of luck: three **nasty** falls and all Pete had **to show for it** were a few **scratches**. A **fluke** indeed! It worried me that Pete wasn't **heeding** these clear cosmic warnings. Surely someone who had fallen three times in less than a **fortnight** would start avoiding high places. Not Pete. Whenever I mentioned that his good luck might **run out**, he just **chuckled** and smiled dreamily. That was when I began to wonder if something was wrong with him. After the incident with the solar panels, Pete fell from a **second storey window** while trying to clean the glass on the outside. He slipped from a **clifftop** path while walking along the coast on a particularly windy day. He **took another dive** from his **roof** while trying to reorientate his satellite dish and he fell out of another tree — this time while

trying to reach the **ripest** cherries on the **topmost** branches. This last accident dislocated his shoulder and I really thought he'd start to **see sense**. But when I warned him that he should be more careful, he just smiled again and said: "You know what, I've decided I really like climbing. I love being up there above the world. I'm thinking of doing a **free-climbing** course. "Don't do it, mate!" I **urged**. "Think of all the **near misses** you've had. It's a **fluke** that you're still alive." A few hours later I learned the other definition of '**fluke**' and formed my second hypothesis. I was watching a nature documentary on TV and the name 'lancet **liver fluke**' caught my attention, because I'd used that very word with Pete not long before. When I saw the ant on my TV screen, hanging dreamily from a tall **blade of grass** waiting to be eaten, I had a sudden vision of Pete **dangling** from the branch of a tree. "Oh my God," I **chuckled aloud** — at this point I was still laughing — "a **fluke** worm has got into Pete's brain!" But the funny side quickly disappeared. Pete was arrested twice for scaling the fire escapes of tall buildings in the middle of the night. Another time he was caught trying **to climb** up the suspension cables of Tower Bridge. Fortunately, some tourists **dragged him off** before he could get too far. That time he was almost **sectioned**, but I didn't believe Pete's mental health was the problem. I was convinced the culprit was the lancet **liver fluke**. According to the internet, the **fluke** doesn't bother with human brains, it goes straight to the **liver** and victims suffer from hepatitis-like symptoms. **Admittedly**, Pete had none of those, but the **faraway** expression that came over his face whenever he talked about his various escapades, his **mesmerised** climbing, made me think of that ant on my TV screen. Unfortunately, we will never know the truth, as Pete's body has never been found. On his final climb he managed to scale the central pylon of the London **cable car** at Greenwich. He'd gone very early in the morning and climbed all the way to the top. I imagine him smiling as he watched the sun rise over London's East End. I know he was smiling, because the tourists who came up in the first **cable car** later described it: Pete's euphoric face as **he swung** out in front of them, seconds before their **cable car, obdurate** and **glassy-eyed** like a mechanical **sheep**, smashed into him, **knocking him into** the Thames.

Glossary

- **aloud** = ad alta voce
- **dragged him off** = trascinare via
- **obdurate** = ostinato
- **liver** = fegato
- **chance occurrence** = evento fortuito
- **chuckled** = ridacchiare
- **see sense** = ragionare
- **urged** = esortare
- **mesmerised** = ipnotizzato
- **knocking him into** = sbattere contro
- **blade of grass** = filo d'erba
- **mop** = straccio
- **to show for it** = avere come conseguenza
- **fortnight** = due settimane
- **free-climbing** = arrampicata libera
- **bucket** = secchio
- **missed his footing** = perdere l'equilibrio, cadere
- **fluke** = colpo di fortuna
- **run out** = esaurirsi
- **near misses** = occasioni in cui è stato vicino ad avere un incidente
- **to climb** = arrampicarsi
- **perch** = posarsi
- **ceiling** = soffitto
- **clumsy** = goffo, impacciato
- **heeding** = prestare attenzione
- **cable car** = funivia
- **he swung** = dondolare
- **sheep** = pecore
- **to graze** = pascolare
- **roof** = tetto
- **ripest** = più mature
- **dangling** = penzolare
- **faraway** = distante

- **glassy-eyed** = con lo sguardo perso
- **flatworm** = vermi piatti
- **cattle** = bovini
- **second storey window** = finestra del secondo piano
- **clifftop** = cima della scogliera
- **sectioned** = ricoverare
- **slithered** = strisciare
- **nasty** = brutte
- **took another dive** = cadere
- **Admittedly** = è vero che
- **liver fluke** = distoma lanceolato
- **ladder** = scala
- **slippery** = scivoloso
- **scratches** = graffi
- **topmost** = più alte