

MATILDA

Do you want to hear the next part of the story?

MRS PHELPS

Story? Did you say story? Did you say... ? Matilda what are we waiting for...

SHE gets into position as MATILDA conjures the story.

MATILDA

Slowly, very slowly, the acrobat wound her shiny white scarf around her husband's neck,

MATILDA & ACROBAT

'For luck, my love.'

MATILDA

she said, kissing him with the gentlest of kisses.

MATILDA & ACROBAT

'Smile – we have done this a thousand times'

MATILDA

But suddenly she hugged him with the biggest hug in the world, so hard that he felt that she would hug all of the air out of him.

And so they prepared themselves for the most dangerous feat that had ever been performed.

The great escapologist had to escape from the cage, lean out, catch his wife with one hand, grab a fire extinguisher with the other, and put out the flames on her specially designed dress within twelve seconds, before they reached the dynamite and blew his wife's head off!

MRS PHELPS screams out loud.

Beat.

MRS PHELPS

Sorry. Go on.

MATILDA

The trick started well.

The moment the specially designed dress was set alight the acrobat swung into the air. The crowd held their breath as she hurled over the sharks and spiky objects – one second, two seconds – they watched as the flames crept up the dress – three seconds, four seconds – she began to reach out her arms towards the cage – five seconds, six seconds – suddenly the padlocks pinged open and the huge chains fell away – seven seconds, eight seconds – the door flung open and the escapologist reached out one huge, muscled arm to catch his wife and the child – nine seconds, ten seconds...

MRS PHELPS

Oh, I can't look!

MATILDA

eleven seconds – and he grabs her hand and, and, and suddenly the flames are covered in foam before they can both be blown to pieces.

MRS PHELPS

Hooray! So the story does have a happy ending, after all!

Beat.

MATILDA

No.

MRS PHELPS

No?

MATILDA

No. Maybe it was the thought of their child. Maybe it was nerves. But the escapologist used just a touch too much foam and suddenly their hands became slippery... and she fell.

MRS PHELPS

No! Was... was she okay? Did... Did she survive?

MATILDA

She broke every bone in her body except the ones at the ends of her little fingers. She did manage to live long enough to have their child. But the effort was too great. *'Love our little girl'* She said *'Love our daughter with all your heart. She is all we ever wanted'*

And then she died.

MRS PHELPS blows her nose hugely, devastated.

And then... things got worse.

Beat.

MRS PHELPS

What? Worse? Oh, no, Matilda, not worse, they can't get worse!