

I don't know how he got up onto the roof but apparently he'd already been there for forty-five minutes by the time I arrived and by the time I'd left he'd been up there for half an hour more but the police got tired of the rapidly increasing crowd that had gathered complete with people riling him up and muttering amongst themselves about what a waste of resources it was and how they should just let him jump or fall and be done with it because what good are two fire-engines and fourteen police on one street when there's crimes to be helped with and bungled and truth be told ignored a lot of the time but not everyone said that too loud except for an old man who ranted nice and clear about how much of a selfish idiot the man on the roof was being whilst he danced and screamed insults at the police all the while claiming not to be from round here in an accent that he couldn't have got anywhere else but here and at first I didn't know what to think of it and honestly I still don't know what to think of it and I don't know if I'll ever know what to think of it but truth be told I couldn't help but get sucked in to the sheer spectacle of it all and how mad it all was with the man and his bag on the roof as he postured and taunted the law getting cockier by the second and even though I could hardly see his face down to the sun I swear you could see he was getting a kick out of the growing crowd and all the phones pointed at him as everyone speculated with one another about how he got up there and how he'd get down and how the police were going to get up to him and why was he even up there in the first place as he continued his posturing and slipped ever so slightly only to regain his footing in an instant as various women in the crowd let out noises you only hear in period dramas where the women are all high pitched and prone to fainting but the longer it went on I couldn't shake the feeling that everyone wanted to see him die and if they didn't want to see him die then at the very least they wanted to hear him hit the pavement with a conclusive thud so that they could go home knowing how it had all ended and satisfy themselves that their forty minutes spent on the street corner watching a man on a roof was time well spent and not only that but his death would have rounded things off quite nicely and made for a much better story for when they recount it to various friends and family and have to go through the rigamarole of narrating the tale of the man on the roof who not once by the way threatened to jump or kill himself whilst the audience were in attendance and if he was suicidal then he wasn't making it verbally known or anything he just seemed like he was taunting the police and genuinely enjoying himself but then again the very fact that this guy had somehow got himself up onto the roof in the early evening and then started taunting the police doesn't exactly scream I'm mentally sound so it might have been a cry for help or it might have been something as simple as he'd gotten himself up there and caught the eye of a passerby or a passing policeman and once the first police car turned up he doubled down and got stuck in or something along those lines I really don't know and besides it's completely irrelevant how or why he was up there because it doesn't change the fact that

amongst the crowd there was that feeling of knowing that everyone there wanted him to fall to his death even though no one except that one disgruntled old man were actively voicing it you could just feel it as if everyone had access to each others' thoughts and were communicating this base internal desire that perhaps no one could explain other than the fact that no matter how they went about it or tried to quash it they all each one of them and me included wanted to see this man die right there in front of our eyes and for all the eyes of all the people who were being video called and watching this man on the roof on their phones completely rapt in their living rooms and then there was all the people watching the livestreams of the man on the roof that at least ten people amongst the crowd were filming with an explicit and unspoken deathwish for the man on the roof who could still well be up there now however many hours later it is since the police moved the crowd on after extending their cordon further and further until all we could see were the trees which truth be told was pretty annoying so a few of us stuck it out for a good ten to twenty minutes more until everyone for the most part had dispersed and even now I'm still baffled by the whole thing and taken aback and totally and utterly in awe of the sinister communal telepathy I was just involved in because I'd be lying if I didn't admit that part of me wanted to see him fall too and try as I might to find a nice explanation for it all all I can muster is that I just wanted to see someone die and I think that must have been the same for everyone who was watching things unfold and simple as it sounds I think it really is as simple as something far more interesting than our daily lives was presented to us and today that something was a man on a roof taunting the police and like it or not the crowd wanted him dead and more than that we all wanted to see it happen and I don't even know if I can offer much in the way of analysis over the event because it feels too cheap to say that it's because we live in a world where reality is nothing more than a carcass whose flesh is endlessly picked at for advertising and entertainment purposes and today this man on the roof stood for reality and stood for death too of course that most exalted ruler of reality so why wouldn't reality's subjects want to watch and bow down to its leader because it seems that this is just something that's inside us all like when I was a younger and saw a little boy not much younger than me ragdolling through the air after getting hit by a car in the last light of a Friday afternoon which funnily enough is the same day as today and probably around the same time now that I think of it but anyway as I was sprinting over to the boy I couldn't help but ask myself whether my desire to help was stronger than my desire to see his mangled body as he lay on the floor covered in blood making sounds I'd never heard before and haven't heard since and much like how I don't know if I'll ever know why we all wanted to see the man on the roof die I don't think I'll ever know which was the prevailing feeling that day on the road with the little boy crying out for his mum and instead only seeing me and a shocked middle aged man scrambling for his phone to ring the paramedics and as much as I'd like

to think that I was acting out of sheer impulsive human kindness I'll always know that beneath it there was that sordid desire to see something truly horrible just like with the man on the roof but I still don't know if that explains anything about why we all watched him for the better part of an hour so perhaps another angle of looking at it would be that after a year of lockdown it was nice to all be focussed on something that wasn't the pandemic and had nothing to do with the metastasising and malignant scandal factory that the nation has been obsessively watching and commenting on and speculating about and cutting off family members over and getting themselves arrested for now that populism has taken our shores and set up camp amongst our algorithms but you know what I really can't shake about the whole thing was just how much it felt like the executions I've read about in which town squares become amphitheatres of death and retribution where the state exerts its power and the populous have a day out in awe of the most realistic site specific performance they've ever seen all the while adoring every minute of it as they mock the condemned and share laughs with each other and prop their children up on their shoulders so no one misses a thing and if you're lucky you'll be able to get nice and close to the corpse after the fact and if you're lucky enough to get right up to the front then you can even spit on the still warm but soon to be cold flesh and shake your head over their broken neck and bulging eyes before they're carted off and tossed into a potter's field with all the other criminals and poor who can't afford a grave of their own and you will know in your heart of hearts that you're better than them and you'll tell your children that they're better than them and how them dying is the perfect lesson to your perfect little angels about what not to do in life or else you too my darling little rosy-cheeked cherub will be pinioned and paraded before you're stood on the gallows soaked in piss and tears for all and sundry to see whereas there on the street corner a hundred and fifty years after our last public execution and fifty something years since our last ever execution by the hands of the law which funnily enough was only three miles north of the very street corner from where children and adults alike all stared at the man three stories up who had by now turned his phone on the crowd and started filming us and counting out the police and hurling obscenities and groans to accompany his own personal documentary which I'll be completely honest about and just come right out and say how much I'd love to see his footage of the whole thing because he was the only person filming in landscape which really stood out as a genuine decision he'd made and not just as an antagonistic reaction to himself being filmed and negotiated with by the police that he and the crowd were actively rooting against as they encroached on our entertainment and shortened his time in the limelight whilst they covertly sent two officers into the building to arrest him for both wasting their time and for whatever reason he was up there in the first place and of course too for criminal damage that came about as a result of him kicking off the building's wooden spire which will probably be the

difference between a night in the cells and an actual lawsuit against him which I can't imagine him winning for a second so why not spend as much time on the roof as possible when his puny reality was going to be categorically terrible for the foreseeable future as he's dragged through the courts or heftily fined or whatever it is that they decide to do before they kick him back out into a life that led him onto the roof in the first place so at least in some twisted way he succeeded for one night only as the star catalyst in bringing a community together even if it was in hopes that they'd watch him die though I don't know if I'm going to hold onto that as a net positive in regards to this evening's entertainment even though it was nice to feel a sense of connection with people for the first time in months after the same thing day in day out again and again and again amen and here now at home away from it all it doesn't seem as though it happened in fact it feels like any other night and come to think of it even then it felt more like a film than anything else what with the rude police and the slew of cameras and every eye fixed on the leading man soliloquising and working through various improvised routines on the roof not quite yet a Bale or Pacino but a rising star all the same beamed onto screens the world over to be watched and mocked and forgotten about because the ending never truly came and we were all denied the closure we all so badly wished for not that his death would have actually prevented him being forgotten and I can't imagine any articles about him will be allowed to give out his name so he will only exist to us as the man on the roof and who knows he might still be up there now but what does that matter with no one to see it and back home as I think back on that strange hour and the images become more and more jumbled as my mind fills in the gaps and question after answerless question arises and lingers and nags it all feels so confusing and overwhelmingly false but my god was it real.