

The New Guy

Peter stepped into the oversized elevator and deliberated in front of the trio of large glass buttons. He looked back and forth between the three options, his finger hovering over one and then pulling back at regular intervals before finally deciding on PH.

The elevator door began to close as the button lit up but was suddenly intercepted by a hand reaching in and forcing it back open determinedly. Peter watched as a well-dressed man in an expensive black shirt and black suit slicked back his dark hair, straightened a beat red silk tie, and stepped onto the elevator.

“Going down?” said the man boisterously, a smirk underlining a hint of sarcasm as he eyed Peter’s white robes.

“Um,” Peter said, straightening his lopsided outfit. “Actually, it’s going up.”

The man looked at the lit button and chuckled.

“What the hey,” he said jovially, tucking a newspaper under one arm. “I’ll come along for the ride.”

“So,” he continued, watching Peter, still wearing the smirk with which he had entered the elevator. “I heard the bell ringing. So, I assume that somebody got his ...”

He trailed off as Peter quickly turned around and proudly demonstrated a pair of large white wings on his back. He shook them for effect.

“Congrats,” said the man, looking down through thin spectacles at the plumage like a science teacher observing a project to be graded. He studied them, rubbing one of the feathers between thumb and forefinger.

“I had a pair of those once. Not nearly as nice as these ones, though. I guess it’s your first day,” the man continued, smoothing down the feathers he had ruffled.

“That’s right. And I guess you’re-” Peter asked, opening his palms to the man’s outfit.

“Going down,” repeated the man, snorting. He was still smiling, a set of extremely white Chiclet teeth peeking through his separated lips.

“I’m Peter,” Peter said extending a hand.

The man took his hand and shook it firmly. A photograph slipped from between the newspaper and floated down to the elevator floor. Immediately Peter kneeled and picked up the photo. A woman stared back at him with intense black eyes. Then, suddenly she was smiling and winking at Peter.

“Is that your wife?” he asked, quickly handing the photograph back to the man and wiping his hands on his robe.

The man nodded.

“What’s she like?” Peter asked.

“Tortured. Getting on my last nerve,” he responded, annoyed. “All day long she whines. Screams about the heat. But you know what they say: It’s not the heat, it’s the-”

“Humidity,” Peter finished eagerly.

The man in black gave him a confused look, scrunching his forehead.

“No. It’s the flames, molten lava, cattle prods and such. You are so new.”

He stopped talking as a phone began to ring.

“Is that me or you?” the man asked, reaching in his pocket.

The ring chimed again, the tune ‘amazing grace’ echoing off the stained wood walls of the large elevator. The man cringed, rolled his eyes, and gave an exaggerated look to Peter’s pocket. Peter looked down at his pocket, surprised, and retrieved the ringing phone.

“Hello?” he said, looking at the man and shrugging. “Oh, and also with you,” he said into the receiver. “Yes, I’m on my way. Oh yes. Found it no problem.”

He looked back to catch the man lifting an eyebrow attentively. The man quickly looked away and down at his paper. Peter turned his back to the man and lowered his voice.

“You’ll never guess who I’m in here with. I think he’s a... Oh, right. Sorry,” Peter’s round cheeks flushed with colour. “Of course, you *would* know. I will. See you soon.”

“Big boss?” asked the man looking up from his paper and examining his fingernails one at a time.

“Yes,” Peter answered, placing the phone back into his pocket. “Just checking in. So, what’s it like working...downstairs?”

“Oh, like any other bigwig corporation, I suppose. Unappreciative boss. Meeting after pointless meeting. And the projects.” He pinched the bridge of his nose and placed a hand on his slender hip.

“Projects?”

“Oh yeah. Well, at a micro level there’s not much to be done. It’s pretty much self-run, what with reality T.V. and the Internet. But then you have some show-off in marketing who pitches a new idea on corrupting the human soul to the boss. Next thing you know it’s rubber stamped with a ridiculous deadline and passed off to yours truly to ‘make it happen’.”

“I see,” said Peter.

“Actually, I’m working on one now. They gave me eleven months to create a new dictatorial leader to take the people of 2-4 nations down the path of destruction and into eternal darkness.”

He rolled his hands and mouthed the words ‘blah blah blah’ before retrieving a cigarette carton from his suit pocket.

“Okay,” said Peter. “And you’ve done this? Created *someone*?”

“Oh ya,” he said, smiling smugly and lighting his smoke. “I’ll be presenting to you know who anytime now. *She*’s going to be great.”

Peter shifted nervously, feeling a growing discomfort with the company and conversation. Suddenly, the oversized elevator felt small and unnaturally warm. He placed his hand on the pocket and felt the rectangular phone, wondering if he should warn the boss.

“Don’t waste your breath,” the man said. “He already knows. You are so new.”

“So then, what are you responsible for?” Peter stuttered, looking straight ahead at the elevator buttons.

“Well, well. Want some references now do you?” said the man, dropping the half-smoked cigarette and crushing it with a pointed, leather boot.

“Hmmm,” he grunted. “Well, nothing as of recent, I guess. But you should see my portfolio. Cloning. Molly. Instagram. All mine,” he continued proudly. “Although Johnson down on fifth seems to think he paved the way to the last one with MySpace. Please.”

Another phone rang. An Eminem song echoed through the elevator as the man retrieved the phone from his suit pocket.

“I love this guy,” said the man, bopping to the tune and putting the phone to his ear.

“Go.” He cocked his head to one side. “What do you mean? I am not goofing off and I resent-”

He paused and paced back and forth in the elevator with the phone to his ear. Peter listened in amusement to the man’s sentence fragments. “What? You’ve got to be joking...*More* coal... Well, what’s Johnson...But I just got some last...Five-hundred people? In half an hour?”

The man turned towards him and leaned against the wall of the elevator, folding his arms, and rolling his eyes at the voice.

“What happened? Oh, that explains...Fine. No problem. Ciao.”

“What was that all about?” asked Peter as the man hung up.

“Apparently an old concert hall collapsed. 500 people gone.”

“That’s a shame,” Peter lowered his head. He looked up again suddenly, wide-eyed. “Wait. They’re *all* down there?”

“It was a Billie Eilish concert.”

“Oh,” Peter mumbled, nodding. He went back to watching the buttons.

“Anyway, like I was saying. Projects. There’ll always be projects I suppose.”

“You don’t feel the least bit guilty? Spending your days on projects to corrupt innocent people? Doesn’t it seem wrong?”

“Ya well, not exactly where I saw myself,” responded the man, seemingly unaffected by the degrading comments. “But hey, we all have our jobs to do, n’est ce pas?”

The elevator came to a sudden halt. Peter breathed a sigh of relief and stepped forward in anticipation. He straightened his cloak and waited for the doors to open.

“It was nice meeting you,” said Peter, looking back at the man and seeing that he was trying to contain a laugh.

Seconds later the door flew open, and Peter jumped back as a flame shot into the elevator. His eyes widened in horror at the sight of pits, fire, and lava. The sound of horrified shrieks stung his ears. He stumbled backwards into the elevator clutching his chest and looked at the man.

The man burst out in a fit laughter and patted him on the back.

“I-I thought this was going up,” stammered Peter, trying to catch his breath. “I pressed PH. Penthouse, right?”

Still laughing, the man shook his head and wiped a stream of fresh tears from one side of his face.

“Ahhh,” the man sighed, holding his stomach in satisfaction. He leaned back into the elevator and pressed the large PG button. “I’ll never get tired of that one. PH-*Pits of Hell*. You want the Pearly Gates. You are so new.”