

Elevator

Andy stepped into the elevator and punched floor 17. He turned around to watch the doors close, thinking about how much he had enjoyed the first day of the seminar. Tall, muscular and good-looking, except for a slightly crooked nose broken in a childhood bicycle accident, Andy thought back to the recently ended season with mixed feelings. A talented, precocious basketball player, he was still miffed about his missed free throw, with no time showing on the clock, in the conference championship game. That miss left them one point down, and their perennial rivals took the trophy home. His teammates and coach were sympathetic; after all, he had scored 23 points and shut down the other team's best player. You couldn't do it all, they said; it was a tight, well-played game---either team could have won. Oh well.....next year would be different. Now, it was good to get away from home and immerse himself in something new.

The elevator stopped at the fifth floor. The doors slid open and a young woman entered. Andy was immediately struck by her beauty and her rather immodest attire. A close-fitting top with a plunging neckline revealed a stunning figure, with legs shown off to strong effect below a skimpy miniskirt. Andy moved slightly away, and she punched floor 22. Andy appreciated attractive women but didn't make a habit of staring at them. He had been brought up to be polite, respectful and self-controlled. No woman was his personal property or toy; why should he ogle a stranger? He had no right to undress this girl mentally, although she didn't leave much to the imagination.

As the doors closed, the unspoken language of the elevator commenced. Everyone uses it expertly: typical elevator occupants don't know each other, and it's taboo to stare at complete strangers in close quarters. So they look elsewhere: at the doors, at the control panels, up at the display announcing each new floor, or down at their feet. Andy always found this routine entertaining but resisted looking people in the eyes; he respected others' privacy.

The elevator didn't go far; at floor 7 it stopped again, admitting a young man some years younger than Andy and much shorter. He gave Andy a quick glance, then did a double take at the girl. He pushed the button for floor 25---the hotel's top floor---then commenced a leisurely study of the girl's figure. He took his time, concentrating on the neckline and the legs. Come on, guy, Andy thought. Show some manners. Yes, she's quite fetching. But show a little respect, okay? As Andy watched the young fellow, he knew exactly what was going on inside the boy's head. Yeah, we have to deal with that one-track thinking: it took discipline, and some common sense, to deflect it.

The youngster shot another glance at Andy; Andy immediately averted his eyes and tried to concentrate on the chirping display: it showed floor 9. Why was it so slow tonight? He stole a peek at the young guy, who had resumed his lascivious meditation. The girl had been watching the doors, but finally locked eyes with her voyeur. "What are you staring at?" she sneered.

With a big grin, the fellow replied, "You. Who else?"

At that precise moment the elevator shuddered and came to a halt. The display read 11, but the doors remained shut. A few seconds passed as everyone turned their attention to the doors and the display. Andy reached over and pressed the three buttons each of them had selected upon entering. Nothing happened.

The girl groaned. "Oh God." Her eyelids closed and she exhaled noisily, as if steeling herself for the inevitable: stuck in a broken elevator, accompanied by a sex-starved jerk. Andy pushed the call button, with no result. He opened the lower panel and withdrew the emergency phone. "Hello. Hello?" There was no connection. He tried all the buttons again, and renewed his efforts on the phone; he waited a long moment. Eventually he replaced the phone. "Looks like we're stuck. For awhile. Anybody have a cell phone?" The girl didn't respond; her eyes remained shut. The young fellow shrugged his shoulders. "Well....." Andy was unsure about what to do next, then decided he had done what he could for now. In a few minutes he'd try the phone again. "We'll wait a bit, and I'll see if the phone works."

The girl remained motionless, eyes closed. The young man glanced at the girl, then at Andy, and back to the girl. He shifted his weight and took a small step toward the girl. "So we're stuck. Just us three." He paused. "Who knows how long before help comes?" Another pause. "As long as we're together here, we may as well get acquainted. Name's Jimmy. Yours?" He addressed Andy.

"Andy."

"How about you?" Jimmy asked the girl, but there was icy silence. Jimmy regarded her waist and fixed on a curious object: a name tag? It was hanging down, and Jimmy bent his head to read it. Andy noticed it too. Had she been at the seminar? Most of the attendees had name tags. "Kimmie. Hey! We rhyme! Jimmy and Kimmie!"

At this, Kimmie's eyes flew open and she snatched at her name tag. "None of your business." She was gorgeous, and in a very foul mood, Andy thought. Of course, trapped in a closed space with two strange guys, one of whom was a sex-crazed juvenile, would put anyone in a bad humor. She stepped away from Jimmy, then remained stationary, equidistant from the two boys. Each regarded the other warily. Jimmy recommenced his visual examination of Kimmie; Kimmie returned his stare.

"Stop gawking at me. Freak."

Jimmy was highly amused. He looked at Andy and laughed. "Freak? Ha. Freaks are guys who look at other guys. Right, Andy? I'm not a freak. I'm as normal as pie." He focused back on Kimmie. "Normal guys look at girls. I'm a guy, you're a girl. So I'm looking. What's your problem, anyway?"

"Her problem is you. She doesn't want you staring at her, so why don't you respect what she wants?" Andy was surprised to hear his voice resounding in the enclosed space.

Jimmy feigned hurt feelings. "Awww. Bad me. Me, a problem? Ha ha. C'mon, Andy. Us guys have to stick together." He gave Andy a significant look. "You do like girls, don't you?" He waited; Andy met his look. "Hey, Kimmie, maybe Andy's the freak. You ever think about that? Guy freaks like other guys. I'm not a freak. Huh. Look at how you're dressed. You want guys to look."

"I can dress any way I want."

"Sure. Actually, you're barely dressed. Isn't that right?"

"Shut up."

"Yeah, that's right. Barely dressed. You have so little on, why'd you bother?"

"I said shut up."

"You can make me shut up. Come over here and make me. Maybe I'll come over to you, and you can make me.....excited. Excite me, and I'll shut up."

"Shut your mouth!" Kimmie was furious, balling up her hands and tensing noticeably. For a second, Andy thought she might take a swing at Jimmy, but she kept her place.

"Yes, why don't you be quiet for awhile?" Andy glared at Jimmy. "She doesn't want your eyes all over her. She doesn't want your dumb comments; she doesn't want you here."

Jimmy angrily whirled to Andy. "Want me here? Well, that's a fine hayride. Doesn't want me here? Why don't I just ooze out the door? Why don't I just vanish like a puff of smoke? I didn't ask to get stuck in a stupid elevator that decided to quit working, did I? Not my fault it broke. You got on, I got on, it stopped, and here we are. I didn't choose to be here. I got places to go, things to do.....but then, Kimmie shows up. I got second thoughts about what I need to do." Jimmy then considered that he didn't need to antagonize two people, and so he softened his tone. "Man, give me a break. Lighten up. I don't want to fight, you know? Not looking for a fight."

Andy sighed. He retried all of the buttons and the phone. Nothing had changed. Sooner or later the hotel staff would have to discover one of the elevators wasn't functioning. But Andy recalled it was quite late; the front desk had seemed deserted, though it was supposed to stay open all night. When he had come in from the street, the lobby was empty; he figured the hotel customers had already retired to their rooms. "Nothing yet."

There was an uncomfortable stillness. Jimmy decided he needed an ally; Kimmie was defiant, but Andy was reasonable. Maybe Jimmy could make amends.

“Say, Andy.” Andy fixed his eyes on Jimmy but said nothing. “Hey, you know, I didn’t mean what I said. I mean, I’m just spouting off, you know, I don’t mean half of what I say. Nobody means half of what they say. So don’t get riled up. I’m a sensible guy. Okay?”

“Maybe you should apologize to Kimmie. She’s the one you offended.”

“Yeah, well.....” Jimmy leered back in Kimmie’s direction. “There’s apologies, and then there’s.....apologies. I can apologize, I’m man enough. I’m man enough for lots of things.” He made a show of breathing heavily. “Yeah, I’m a man.” He moved as if to reach for the girl, but she abruptly brought up a clenched hand, threatening.

“You touch me, you’ll get this.” She spread her fingers and displayed her name tag, open, with the sharp needle pointed toward Jimmy. She had removed it with no one noticing.

“Whoa.” Jimmy froze, then backed away. “Hey, I don’t want a fight. Man. Be careful with that. Your mom ever tell you not to play with sharp objects? Don’t handle things you don’t know how to use.”

“I know how to use it, freak.”

“Boy, what a temper. Look at her wrong, and she blows up. Calling people names. I mean, you’re not being very civilized. I’m trying to be nice, and all I get is crap. Your mom teach you to call people names?”

Kimmie replied with menace. “You’re the one who’s not civilized. Obviously my mom taught me better than yours taught you. If you ever had one.”

In a sudden fit of temper, Jimmy slammed an open palm against the door. In a vicious tone, he countered, “You leave my mom out of it! You don’t know her.”

“You don’t know mine.”

“Don’t get so personal.”

“You’ve been personal from the second you got on.”

“You’ve been in a snit the whole time.”

“You’ve been a freak the whole time.”

Jimmy raised an arm maliciously. “You’ve---”

Andy interposed himself between the two, facing Jimmy. “Calm down.” He glowered down at Jimmy, who relaxed a bit and dropped his arm. “Take a breather.” Andy waited. When he thought the combatants had composed themselves somewhat, he moved back to try the buttons and phone again, leaving Jimmy and the girl with unobstructed views of each other. With an audible grunt of exasperation, Andy communicated the frustration they all felt. They seemed to be abandoned by the world, forgotten, suspended in technological limbo. No one seemed to know, or even suspect, the existence of three young people, imprisoned in an accident, forced to work out their troubled relationship with no resources outside of their own wits.

Jimmy contemplated his options. He desired the girl, ill-tempered or not, but Andy kept interfering. Surely, he thought, Andy and he were alike in their affections. If they worked together, the girl would relent. Place and time didn’t really matter; opportunity was the dictator.

Jimmy emitted a short laugh. “Huh! Hey, Andy, no hard feelings, right? I wasn’t going to attack her. Not even raise a finger. You know? All bluff, that’s me. They call me ‘Bluff.’ Funny, right? Oh, I take action when necessary, when I have to. Sometimes you have to act. But not always. You can make a point by putting on a show; don’t need to actually do everything you say you’re going to do.”

“Anybody ever say you talk too much?” A challenge from Kimmie.

“Anybody ever say you’re too sexy for your own good?” Jimmy took a step toward her. Kimmie flashed the name tag, and Jimmy retreated with mock horror. “Oh, I’m so scared. Scared out of my gourd. You think a dumb, one-inch pin’ll protect you?”

“I put it up your rear and you’ll know it.”

“If you could ever get it anywhere near me.” Jimmy began a series of defensive postures, pretending to fight off imaginary assailants. Kimmie and Andy were momentarily startled, but were put at ease when it became apparent that Jimmy was only acting. Jimmy gave a self-satisfied chuckle, puffed up by his supposed prowess. “Hey Andy. I meant what I said. No hard feelings, huh? Don’t mean what I say, always.” He assumed a resting position, using only his right hand to gesticulate. “Hey, I like it when they fight. Makes the action more exciting. And I’m a man of action.”

“You’re not a man. You’re a spoiled little kid.” This from Kimmie.

Andy was alarmed at this renewed antagonism. “Kimmie, I wouldn’t make it any worse than it already is.” Andy was the reasonable one, definitely.

Jimmy brightened at this slight rebuff to the girl. “Yeah, Kimmie. Don’t make it worse.” He sidled up to Andy and nudged him in the ribs. Andy was now between the two. “Don’t you like it when they fight, Andy? Show a little spirit, a little fire?”

Andy was beginning to despair of imparting any reason into the boy’s thick head, but he continued on, gamely. “If someone fights, then something’s wrong.”

“Hey, nothing’s wrong. Girls, they just pretend. Want to know if you really want them. Play hard to get. Makes the chase more fun, like a big hunting game. They’re not just going to cave in, keel over like a wimpy stick in the sand, you know? They gotta show some fight, some mettle. Gotta be tough. You don’t want a wimpy woman. Guy needs a tough woman. Tough woman for a tough man.”

Feeling emboldened, Kimmie interjected, “You’re not a tough man. You’re a spoiled, dumb kid. Who needs a mommy.”

Some of Jimmy’s former anger resurfaced. He jabbed a finger towards her face. “You shut up!”

“My, my. Now look who’s telling who to shut up.” Kimmie reveled in her retort.

Jimmy resumed his thesis with Andy. "Yeah, when they resist, you know they want you. The more they say no, the more they mean yes. Isn't that right? That's right, isn't it, Kimmie?" Jimmy moved to the center of the elevator, confronting Kimmie, but addressed her obliquely. "They say no, but the way they dress says yes. Yes, come get me. Come on, Andy, you see it. Look at these strippers. Show off their sizzling bodies, their buns and curves. Dancing around in nothing. That's not a shirt, it's a hanky. It doesn't cover anything. Why bother putting it on? You just want to take it off."

Kimmie brandished her name tag again. "I can teach you a lesson, freak."

"Freak! Look who's a freak. That the only word you know, just one word? Saying 'freak' over and over. You're a one-word wonder." Each made a move toward the other, and Andy swiftly moved between them. As he maintained the center, the fighting pair slowly circled clockwise, hurling their insults.

"I know ten times more words than you ever heard in school, freaky freak. Oh, I forget: you probably flunked out of kindergarten."

"You say no, but you're a stripper: your threads say yes. You know you want me."

"Who wants a mamma's boy?"

"You do. You wouldn't know the difference."

"I'll pin the tail on the donkey. You're a donkey."

"So you like to strip for donkeys."

"Donkey freak. Big ears, and a hee-haw."

"Big boobs, you want a donkey."

"Donkey freak! Your mamma's a freak."

Jimmy's anger was building. This girl infuriated him. He wanted her---for what? Smack her around first, teach her who was boss. She held her stupid name tag pin; he'd pin her to the wall. He stopped circling; she did the same, precisely opposite him. Barely in control, Jimmy tried a new assault. "Hey,

Andy. Here's a great idea. You want this girl just like I do. You know you do. You appreciate girls, you like them like any normal guy would. I knew it from the first. I could tell the minute I saw you: a real guy, not a guy freak. We can both have her. Hey, you can go first. I'll hold her, you go first. Then it's my turn. Whattaya say?"

Kimie felt she was losing ground. She kept up her barrage. "You're momma's a freak!"

Jimmy continued. "You go first. We can take her. Work as a team." He was combating his anger with difficulty. He had become enraged at this girl; he much preferred sexual titillation, the condition he found when he had entered the elevator. He needed to recapture the former mood and shed the present one. "Take a gander. Short miniskirt. Great legs. Doily for a shirt. Might as well be topless."

"Momma's a donkey freak."

"Take a gander. Don't stare at me, stare at her. It'll do you good." Andy was glaring at Jimmy, watching his movements. "Hey, you know I'm right. She wants me. She wants you. Probably wants you more. She likes you, hasn't said 'boo' to you all night. So take her. She wants---"

"She wants only to be left alone," Andy interrupted.

"No! She wants a guy."

"She didn't get in here looking for a guy. She came here for the sole purpose of returning to her room."

"Haw. Girls are always looking. She can take a detour on the way to her room."

"No, they're not always looking. I know plenty of girls, and I know what I'm talking about."

"Hey, you know, you need to collect yourself."

"You're the one who needs to collect. Ever since you came in, you've been eyeing this girl. You only want one thing, but it's clear she doesn't want you. Take people for their word."

"People don't mean their word! See how she's dressed? It's an invitation, an all-you-can-eat buffet!"

“She said she can dress any way she wants. The way you dress isn’t an invitation. It’s more of an obedience to fashion, or dress the way your friends do. Half the time girls don’t know what effect it has.”

“Effect?! Wear what she’s wearing, and you darn well know the effect!”

“But her words say otherwise. Pay attention to words.”

“Words don’t mean squat. Only action matters.”

“Words matter. Listen to her words. And her actions, too. Didn’t she threaten you with the pin?”

“Huh! What a threat.”

“Maybe not a big threat, but still sincere. She’ll defend herself with whatever’s available.”

Jimmy was doubly upset now. Not only had he alienated the girl, he also was strongly opposed by this tall jock who should be on his side. Jimmy had failed to win Andy over. “Well. Maybe I was wrong earlier.”

“Wrong about what?”

“About you.”

“How so?”

“About guy freaks.”

Andy pretended to be obtuse. “Guy freaks?”

“Yeah. I took you for a normal guy. So maybe you’re not normal.”

“Oh, I’m normal.”

“Doubt it. You’ve barely looked at this girl, but I see the way you’re looking at me.”

“How’s that?”

“I’ve seen it before. The guy freak look. They look at you a certain way, the way they *should* look at girls, but they concentrate on guys. Just the way you’re doing.”

“Couldn’t say I know what you mean.”

“Hey. You know. You don’t like girls. You like guys.”

“I like everyone.”

“Bisexual freak, huh? Sex with girls, sex with guys.”

“Boy, you’re on a single track. Everything’s sex with you.”

“That’s the world. Sex is it.”

“Sex is *not* ‘it.’ Get a life.”

“I got a life. At least I’ve got my sex straight. Unlike you.”

Andy laughed. He could be offended, but he actually found it funny. Jimmy’s ploy was pathetic.

“Like I said, get a life. There’s a lot more to life than sex.”

“Not much. Except sleep and eat.”

“Well, you can take your sexual bravado somewhere else. We don’t want it.”

“Well, maybe I would! If the dumb elevator worked!” Fuming, Jimmy took a moment to let his anger abate. He returned to his earlier argument. “Like I said. See how she’s dressed? She’s waiting for a man of action.”

“No. Kimmie’s words were crystal clear. She doesn’t want you. So you have no right to ignore her words.”

“Like I said: words don’t mean squat.”

“I don’t know what planet you come from, but usually words mean exactly what they sound like. Maybe you grew up hearing lies. Society doesn’t function well for long if it’s built on lies. It has to be built on honesty, and words and actions that are sincere, that mean exactly what they appear to mean.”

“If I want something, I take it.”

“No you don’t. If you leave \$50 out, can I take it if I want it?”

“I wouldn’t be stupid enough to leave \$50 out in the open. And if I did, maybe I deserve to lose it, if I can’t even hold onto my own money.”

“What if you didn’t leave it out? I could break into your house, find it and take it. Why don’t I steal your car, or take your clothes, or rip your wallet out of your pocket? Why can’t I take anything I please that belongs to you?”

“Those things are mine! You have your stuff, and I have my stuff. You try to take my car and I’ll mash you flat!”

“Exactly. You don’t take something that belongs to someone else. That’s immoral, wrong and stupid. You don’t take someone’s belongings, and you don’t take someone’s body.” Jimmy appeared momentarily puzzled, and for once didn’t have a snappy reply. “A person’s body is his own. A girl’s body is her own. It belongs to her and not to anyone else in the universe. She may be ugly or pretty, covered up or naked. Whatever. Her body is still her possession, hers alone, not yours, not mine, not her boyfriend’s, not her parents’, not anybody else’s. No one has the right to do anything he wishes with her body. You have your possessions: your wallet, your clothes, your car, your body. She has her possessions: her purse, her clothes, her room, her body. None of it is yours to do anything with at all. So back off. Leave her alone, leave everyone alone. You can be a sensible part of the social scene, or you can be a problem. You know what we do with problems?” Andy paused to see if Jimmy would answer. No answer was forthcoming, but Jimmy’s face darkened with fury. Andy continued, “I asked you, do you know what we do with problem people like you?” Jimmy’s expression contorted with rage, he opened his mouth, but no sound issued. Andy answered his own question. “We throw them in jail. There, you can get help, or you can rot. Your choice.”

Jimmy spluttered, attempting to voice a reply; his body shook, and he backed against the wall. This wasn’t going at all like he planned. Andy should have been an unconcerned bystander or a willing participant; instead, he staunchly opposed Jimmy’s machinations. Jimmy willed himself to retake control, but it was difficult, almost impossible. He had to take decisive action. He had worked his mouth quite a bit, but had put none of his proposals to the test. What would happen if he made a

move? The other two had also said many words, but that's all they were: only words. Jimmy was a guy of action, contrary to what he had said earlier. As he had finally declared, words meant nothing. Actions were the determiners of fate. Actions fleshed out the words or made them inconsequential. Words were ciphers; actions were real.

Jimmy regarded Andy, who was still planted in the elevator's center. Kimmie was off to one side; Jimmy had a straight shot at her, although Andy was closer. Jimmy's eyes flicked back and forth between Andy and Kimmie. He judged Andy to be slow-moving, despite his superior moralizing. People who shouted sermons were consistently slow to act, or tended toward inaction. Jimmy really didn't need words. As he had admitted, words were only for bragging, for show. He could lasso them for his use, or release them to the four winds. Words were rather useless. Tonight, he was finished with words.

In a sudden lunge, Jimmy was practically straddling the girl, grabbing her breast. With cat-like speed she wielded her ever-present name tag, slicing it jaggedly along Jimmy's right side. He howled with surprise but determined to maintain his position, when Andy throttled him, violently flinging him back. Jimmy saw with unexpected clarity that apparently Andy was also a person of swift action. Jimmy would make no headway with the girl while Andy played defense. Jimmy could deal with her and her dumb name tag, just as he had man-handled many girls in previous situations. The details were different, but the results were usually the same: the girl succumbed; he was the victor. Now, however, there was a complication: he would have to neutralize Andy. Yes, the protector was a head taller and yes, that was a shockingly strong choke that sent him backpedaling from the girl. But he could counter effectively; he could take this jock down. And when he fell, like Goliath in front of David, all of his high and mighty words would tumble down with him. Then he could do whatever he pleased with the girl.

Jimmy gathered his strength, staring at Kimmie but observing Andy peripherally, who had his arms in a fighting position, but at his sides, leaving his front unprotected. Jimmy drove into Andy's abdomen

with vehemence, positive that he could topple the giant. Andy bent forward but absorbed the impact fairly well: the many months of weight training and athletic conditioning weren't for naught. He brought a forearm into Jimmy's throat, shooting the chin upward. Jimmy grabbed for Andy's face, but at that precise moment Kimmie rushed forward and jabbed the small pin entirely into Jimmy's upper arm. Yelping in pain, he threw his arm up and back; Andy used the opening to smash a fist into his jaw. Jimmy staggered back but refused to yield: he dove for Andy's knees, to bring him down to the floor and equalize the struggle. Andy came down on Jimmy's back, and a furious, uncontrolled wrestling match ensued. There was a flurry of punches, kicks and grapplings, each boy striving to the utmost for any advantage. Kimmie retreated to a corner, dizzied by the frantic, chaotic scene, afraid to kick for fear of injuring Andy. After what seemed an interminable period, but had been only a minute or two, Andy wound up on top of Jimmy, pummeling with fury and effectively grinding down Jimmy's resistance. Jimmy couldn't return the blows any longer and was reduced to defending his head. He was enraged by his defeat, but even more he began to fear for his life. He had put his thoughts into actions and had failed. He had misjudged Andy's strength and determination. He had purposed to commandeer the girl and had not come anywhere near to his goal. She was unusually tough and ready to fight, but Andy was the totally unexpected factor. Jimmy had severely underestimated him. Now he was being pulverized, his body broken, and his opponent showed no sign of letting up.

Jimmy screamed with all of his remaining strength. "Stop! Stop! You're going to kill me!" Andy ceased the beating but stayed astride his victim, surveying the damage. Jimmy's face was severely bruised, bleeding from the mouth, nose, and one eye. He may have had broken teeth; it was hard to tell. Deciding that Jimmy had been effectively put out of action, Andy struggled to stand up. His hands were aching and his midsection throbbed; otherwise he was unscathed. Neither boy had had much fighting experience; it had been an improvised, desperate altercation. Jimmy had shown cruel grit and

dangerous purpose; Andy's greater size and strength, coupled with a willingness to use them, had overwhelmed Jimmy.

Jimmy flopped to a sitting posture and awkwardly scooted into a corner, cradling his jaw. Sobbing and blubbing, in a breaking voice, he spat out, "You criminal! I bet you broke my jaw!" With tears and blood running down his face, he looked dumbly around for anything to use as a wipe. Finally he yanked his shirttail out and dabbed with it, groaning, spitting and crying. "You creep! You almost killed me! I'll get a lawyer and you'll be sorry! They'll lock you up!"

Andy let out a peal of laughter. "Me?! You're the one they'll lock up! You tried to rape this girl, and then you attacked me. You got what was coming to you. We acted in self defense."

"No! That's not it! You're a liar! You're both pitiful liars!"

"Huh! Who will they believe? Not you, that's for sure. It's our word against yours. Two to one. Plus, my bet is you have a history, if not a record. You've lost. In more ways than one."

Andy and Kimmie kept their eyes glued on Jimmy. Andy was winded and his heart rate was sky high, but he was vindicated and triumphant. Kimmie was shaking uncontrollably, not sure she could truly believe what had transpired in only a few minutes. Jimmy cowered in the corner, weeping, fiddling with his shirt, trying to nurse his wounds.

Suddenly the elevator lurched, the lights flickered, and inexplicably it resumed its interrupted upward journey. It dutifully stopped at 17, Andy's floor, but he wasn't getting off until the girl was safe and Jimmy was in handcuffs. The doors hissed open and shut, and they proceeded to 22, Kimmie's floor. She made no movement to get off, continuing to stare at Jimmy. The elevator arrived at the top floor, the doors parted, and with an unexpected burst of energy, Jimmy managed to propel himself out into the hall, half crawling, half limping. Too tired and spent to chase after him, Andy watched him go. He'd call the police and they would locate the young thug. As the doors slid shut, Andy spotted a small, thin

object on the floor near where Jimmy had sat: it was the name tag, partly smeared with blood. He bent down and picked it up, wiping it clean with his fingers. He offered it to Kimmie. "Here."

"I don't want it. You can throw it away." She was still shivering but beginning to recover. As she settled down, rooted to where she stood, Andy remained patiently on one side. The elevator stayed put, a mute, uncomprehending machine, ready to transport its occupants anywhere they wished---that is, if it worked properly.

Finally, Kimmie was sufficiently calm, and resolved to continue on to her original destination. She pushed floor 22 and they began their descent. The machine came to stop and the doors slid open. Kimmie started over the threshold but paused, her presence preventing the doors from closing. She turned and looked up at Andy, the first time she had regarded him closely the entire evening. She took his forearm and gripped it tightly between her hands. "Thank you. Thank you for saving my life. I'll never forget it."

"You're welcome. Ma'am."

She gave his arm a strong squeeze, released her hold, pivoted away and entered the hallway. The doors closed and Andy punched 17. He surveyed the elevator: there was no sign of any struggle except for some random blood spots where Jimmy had sat in defeat. Andy became aware that he was exhausted and sleepy. A king-sized, soft hotel bed would be the perfect balm.

After he called the police, of course.