

3:45 PM

"Kids these days are so lazy."

"No reason for a perfectly healthy young man like him to take an elevator..."

"What was he thinking? Wasting electricity like that."

"I bet you he'll turn up dead in a few minutes."

"Oh, you know he will."

3:50 PM

Sirens.

A hooded figure slips a knife back into its pocket and leaves, the corpse on the elevator floor still oozing blood.

The job has been done, and now someone must clean up the mess. There's a small piece of paper in the corpse's jacket pocket, though only one of the too-late paramedics knows where to look.

She unfolds the note and smiles.

THAT SUNDAY

"We regret to inform you that your child has perished in an elevator. As you all have likely heard, such cases are out of our jurisdiction. There is nothing we can do but offer our condolences. Take care to avoid all unnatural methods of transportation in the future, so you don't meet the same fate--"

He stopped reading and balled up the piece of paper, voice thick with grief and fury. "I can't believe this. They're threatening us. They've got the fucking audacity to THREATEN us."

"They said it's out of their jurisdiction, dear," his wife pointed out mildly. Her eyes were red from crying, but it didn't show in her tone. "They're trying to warn us."

"He was mu--"

"Let's stop worrying about the ifs and buts of his death, okay? Be grateful for what we still have."

"How can you be fine with this?"

"I never said I was fine," she said, her fingertips grazing the bottle of pills that would make her the worst sort of hypocrite. She smiled, and it was empty. "But you will be."

END PROLOGUE

I don't listen to the news these days. It's just too sad to think of all the people turning up dead, in department stores, in apartment buildings- hell, even in car dealerships. Even sadder than the fact that we've been in a fuel crisis for far too long now and things are starting to shut down, for real. I mean, when the buses and streetcars closed, that was one day, but now it seems that every day a new storefront is closed, a new family on the streets, begging for what nearly nobody can afford to give.

I've heard rumors that people are being killed for using exorbitant amounts of energy, but I have no way to know if that's true. Sometimes I'll look online- when the ancient power cord for my computer is working- but the media seems very hush-hush. The only real signs are the obituaries and the crazy conspiracy theorists that swear that the government is behind all this.

The government gave me this job.

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My fingers skate over the keyboard of the pristine workplace laptop, the pleasant clicking noises of the keys fading into the background melody of my chattering coworkers. Today, I choose not to focus on their conversations, but instead throw myself wholly into my work. I work in resource conservation- I look over the resource use proposals sent in by those who work below me and everyday citizens before they're approved to send to my higher-ups. It's a well-paying job, and it keeps me comfortably fed.

*Ding.*

The service elevator's doors open, and I lift my head from the computer just enough to catch the glassy-eyed stare of the dead body that slumps forwards out of the elevator. For just a heartbeat, everyone around me stills, voices quieting, before the unmistakable tang of blood reaches us. Someone screams, and I hear the person next to me pull out their phone.

"911- what's your emergency?"

"Cleanup on the third floor of the..." the rest of his sentence fades into the background, but I'm still frozen, staring at the slumped body on the floor. *Cleanup?* Not murder? Something is off here, something is horribly wrong. Blood rushes in my ears and I blink vigorously, trying to erase the scene, yet the man next to me is still calmly listing details, tapping his fingertips on his thigh in a way that suggests annoyance. Someone is *dead*, and he's *annoyed*?

"Thank you." He hangs up and turns to me, and his voice gentles, like he's talking to a wounded animal. "Why don't you go take the stairs down to the main floor, like everyone else?" Sirens echo in the distance and I shake my head slightly, before realizing that the room has quieted- everyone else must have left while he was making the call. *Cleanup.* I feel nauseous and stagger forwards a step, catching myself on the desk.

“Easy, there,” he cautions. “Come on, let’s go downstairs.” This time, he includes himself in the statement, and I allow him to nudge me in the direction of the staircase. Usually, I count the steps winding up and down; it gives me a weird kind of joy, but now I’m stumbling blindly, not even bothering to find my bearings in the comfort of numbers. I can’t find my way back into the safety of my routine. Routine, like someone falling out of an elevator dead is something that happens every day.