

Elevator
By: Lauren Foster

There is a girl. She is The Girl. The Girl hurls once again before stepping on the brown elevator with a gold encrusted symbol. She leans against the matching goldish-brown wall as the elevator closes. Her dark auburn hair is frizzy by the night's humidity and her hazel eyes are dull and don't have the same shine as when the night started. She coughs in her already dirty hands and then rubs her eyes. The Girl has lost her luster. No one knows exactly when or how she lost it, but it's far from arms length. Just when The Girl is about to imprison herself with her thoughts, the elevator dings.

DING!

The doors open and there stands a mirrored version of The Girl but paler. Almost ghostly.

There is a ghost. It is The Ghost. Floating tirelessly. Tirelessly haunting. Not all souls, but just the ones lost. The Ghost floats beside The Girl expecting a fearful reaction. However, no emotions come across The Girl's face. The Girl has lost her luster, and The Ghost does not have the ability to make it shine. The Ghost eyes the human disaster that is The Girl.

"Youuuuuu loookk...lossssssttt." The Ghost speaks slowly as if dialogue is a chant. The Ghost examines The Girl's dead gaze into nothingness in sharp yet delicate movements. The Girl continued to stand in silence, prison to her mind.

"Ahhhhh," The Ghost sighs in relief and evil intent, "so you areeee...lossssssttt."

Just then, the elevator begins rattling uncontrollably. The floor button lights as well as the lights above them flicker with inconsistency, but The Girl

does not budge. Her expression continues to be deadpan. The Ghost lifts its arms up, beginning to shift into a scarier being. Its eyes turn black and its transparent appearance starts to solidify into a sharp white. That white soon slowly turns into the charcoal black to replicate its eyes to conclude the terrifying transformation. The Girl side-eyes The Ghost, and The Ghost responds with a horrifying roar, ready to possess The Girl...

...when...

DING!

The elevator and The Ghost return to normal as the doors open. There stands a tall creature with an unnecessarily large amount of fur. Its matted brown fur mixed with its subtle yet pungent dandruff and grime makes green goop drip on the floor. The Ghost and The Girl stare at the creature in disgust. As if the creature's appearance is too monsterly.

There is a monster. It is The Monster. Always lurking around the woods rain or shine. Lurking and stalking from the edge of the woods just to walk, lurk, and stalk into another separate set of woods. The Monster looks over at The Girl and The Ghost and notices only The Ghost staring back. The Girl turns away to continue looking straight.

"What are you looking at?" The Monster asks with a scruffy voice. Whenever it speaks, it growls with ferocious intentions.

"Youuuuuu loookk...pooositvelyyy...ghaaaasttlyyy." The Ghost chants nauseously. The Monster growled louder and louder. The Girl remains unbothered.

"What's that supposed to mean?" The Monster asks with a hindered fierce snarl.

“Diiiiireeee? Parrrrrloussss? Grooottttyyyy?” The Ghost vocalizes. The Monster pauses while looking side-to-side puzzled.

“Okay? W-What does that mean?” The Monster queries in discomfort.

“You look terrible!” The Ghost exclaims in its regular voice. The Girl eyed it softly, lifting her eyebrow before looking away again.

The Monster gasped, “Well I am offended! I mean how do you think you would look if you couldn’t clean yourself for weeks and all kinds of woodsy goop fell on you every day?”

“I would just go through it.” The Ghost answers.

“Hmph. Easier said than done,” The Monster sneers, “Hmph. You wish. Hmph. As if. The winded force of branches hitting your face one after the other. Stepping in what you think is a mud puddle but it’s quicksand. Then you-”

“No,” The Ghost interrupts, “I mean I would literally go through it. I-I can float and go through things.”

“Oh.” The Monster cowers in embarrassment. Silence fills the elevator as The Girl scoffs.

“Well whatever!” The Monster speaks and stands back up, “You don’t go around talking about people’s appearance. It’s rude!” The Monster then crosses its arms in protest.

“If the truth hurts, all you had to say was ‘ouch.’” says The Ghost.

“And what is THAT supposed to mean?” The Monster growls as its body stands up four inches higher.

“You look and smell terrible, your breath makes me glad to be dead, and those mud puddles you say you step in? Might’ve just been one of your loose shits you forgot you took.” The Ghost declares, floating up to The Monster to match its skyscraper height. The two creatures are now eye-to-eye, but the tension closing in on the elevator is lethal.

“You better take that back or I’ll-”

“You’ll what?” The Ghost cuts The Monster off. This infuriates The Monster as it lets out a thunderous roar and tries to attack. However, The Ghost flies through the dirt-and-slime-ridden fur, causing The Monster to hit itself.

“Stop hitting yourself?” The Ghost jokes. The Monster slams its knuckles on the floor like a gorilla and lets out a loud huff of aggravation. The Ghost and The Monster argue back and forth as both parties exchange harsh words and fearsome roars.

Yet, with all the calamity going on, The Girl is unphased. She simply shakes her head and places her temple between her thumb and index finger.

“Um?” A voice coming from in front of them interjects, “going up?”

DING!

The elevator doors open, and a regular person steps inside once The Monster and The Ghost confirm it’s ascending. However, there is something odd about this person. Since it is cramped now, The Monster is closer to this person and notices the anomaly.

“Whoa man,” The Monster calmly yet gruffly exclaims, “wild night?”

There is a one-eyed person. This is The One-Eyed Person. Hung over from tonight’s events as well as the night before. And the night before that. One would assume that The One-Eyed Person lost their eye as a result of one of their late night adventures. On the contrary, the truth is that they have always been one-eyed. Depth perception always missing. Looking at life through a single lens. A single perspective. Their own.

“Yeah man,” The One-Eyed Person speaks with a faint hoarseness, “wild night is an understatement.”

“Man? You think that this is a man?” The Ghost scoffs at The Monster before softly giggling. The One-Eyed Person scrunches up their nose for two reasons: one, to look at The Ghost in aversion for its comment, and two, because of The Monster’s odor.

Completely ignoring The Ghost’s comment, The One-Eyed Person says to The Monster, “wild night for you too? You definitely reek of it.”

The Monster laughs forcibly, “Nah, man. Just a day in the life of me, I guess. But I mean you probably smell worse stuff than me on a regular.”

“What do you mean?” The One-Eyed Person questions.

“You know. Pirate life out at sea, seeing all kinds of creatures and smelling all kinds of smells.” The Monster exclaims dreamily and lets its imagination run like a child.

“Dude, sorry to break it to you, but I’m not a pirate.” The One-Eyed Person reveals. The joy in The Monster’s face instantly fades away as The Ghost laughs out loud. The Monster growls.

“Hey, don’t laugh! It didn’t know. No harm, no foul.” The One-Eyed Person speaks in defense. Before The Monster could break out into a smile for The One-Eyed Person’s kindness, it is interrupted by The Ghost’s raucous laughter. The Girl looks in on the action, but the minute The Monster solemnly gazes at her, she swiftly turns away.

“What’s her problem?” The Monster quietly asks itself.

“I’ve met pirates in my past lifetime, and I could’ve told you a mile away that this abomination is not a pirate.” The Ghost guffaws.

“Hey! This man may not be a pirate, but he’s at least more of a decent person than you!” The Monster yells.

“Decent per...I’m dead, smartass!” The Ghost yells back louder, “And what do you even know about people besides EATING THEM?”

Silence as well as the returning lethal tension consumes the room once more. Suddenly, the elevator begins slightly rattling, causing the floor button lights to flash a little bit. The Girl softly groans before sitting down and scooting to the corner of the elevator. She brings her knees to her chest, and she lays her head on her knees.

“What’s her problem?” The One-Eyed Person quietly asks themselves before proceeding to talk louder, “Anyway, guys. Not going to lie to you, I’m high as hell right now. So if nothing gets more awkward, I’ll show myself out-”

“Why on earth would you think that I’ve eaten people?” The Monster asks offended yet with a sense of wanting to understand. For the first time since The Ghost got on the elevator, it was silent.

“So you talk when you don’t need to, but when someone finally asks *you* a question, you say nothing? I mean, you’ve been disrespectful and rude this whole time and now the one time I try to understand you, you freeze. Now, I’m going to ask you again. Why do you think that I have eaten-”

“Because-” The Ghost pauses.

“BECAUSE WHAT?!” The Monster releases its loudest roar yet.

“BECAUSE YOU KILLED ME!” The Ghost cries out, “Okay? It’s because you killed me in cold blood.”

The Monster stumbles back in disbelief as it begins trembling in shock.

“Hey, hey big guy. Take it easy.” The One-Eyed Person consoles trying to keep The Monster steady. The Girl lifts her head up from her knees with hesitation to gaze at The Monster’s reaction. Nonetheless, the minute it looks back at The Girl, she turns away staring at the other end of the wall.

“No,” The Monster’s voice breaks, “No, I couldn’t have done that. I couldn’t have-”

“You could have and you did. The damage is done.” The Ghost mutters coldly yet with a quivering voice.

The Monster begins to hyperventilate as The One-Eyed Person whispers and consoles it. The Ghost continues talking over The Monster's heavy breathing while The One-Eyed Person tries to quiet it. Calamity ensues again as The Girl remains silent with her head resting between the open space of her two arms. She clenches her eyes shut trying to re-enter the rigid prison of her own mind.

...when...

DING!

The Girl is the only one to notice the elevator doors opening. Standing on the other side is something horrifying yet calming at the same time staring back at The Girl with its three eyes in solemnity. The light from its broken star-encrusted emblem in the middle of its chest fades away and comes back like a dying firefly. Its tourmaline sleek horns match the skin tone of its whole body as its horns reflect the light in the elevator. In response, The Girl becomes oddly transfixed. For the first time tonight, The Girl expresses real emotion as tears wells in her eyes. The being walks in the elevator, ignoring the other creatures yelling and releasing emotions back and forth, and squats directly beside The Girl as they stare into the other's pool of eyes.

"It's going to be okay." The being says while pressing its hand on The Girl's back. This makes The Girl's welled tears flow out one after the other, sending haunting chills with a strange wave of serenity down her spine. The Girl swiftly avert her eyes in the opposite direction. The being proceeds to try and see The Girl eye-to-eye again as it repeats its reassurance. Something about the being's speech makes its words sound both scratchy and earthy that comes across as evil. Almost demonic.

There is a demon. This is The Demon. Proclaimed to be an evil spirit filled with nothing but deceit, deception, and destruction when it is nothing more but a fallen angel that once trekked the heavenly skies. Commonly misunderstood with its myths, stories, and legends where some are true, and some misconstrued. On the outside is a version everyone sees of the demon now, even though it already knows everything about everyone as well. However, underneath it all, diving within the core, there lies a blazing heart of gold. The Demon does not leave The Girl's side as the commotion between The Monster, The Ghost, and The One-Eyed Person grows louder and softer. Now, the elevator ascends.

After what feels like a lifetime yet is only a few minutes, the elevator is now eerily quiet. The Monster and The Ghost are now at parallel corners of the elevator. The One-Eyed Person stands in the middle but a little closer to The Monster in case they have to tame it again while The Ghost floats near The Girl and The Demon. The thick atmosphere is inescapable, but The Ghost looks over at The Monster crouched over avoiding eye contact, clearing its invisible throat. The Monster does not move.

"You seriously don't remember, do you?" The Ghost quivers. Without satisfying The Ghost with a gaze, The Monster shakes its head. Everyone looks at The Ghost waiting to hear its story. The Girl adjusts her sitting which evokes The Demon to adjust closer to her.

"Why don't you tell us?" The Demon suggests while wrapping its arm around The Girl. She adjusts again so her head could lay on The Demon's shoulder, knees still close to her chest. She sighs simultaneously with The Ghost in defeat.

Giving in, The Ghost begins, "Fine. When I was alive, I would go into the woods to gather some fish and berries for my town. Those particular woods

near my town were where merchants would get the food to sell to townsfolk. I often helped out with the merchants to stay out of trouble. But, hey, I would always find a way to stir the pot,”

The Ghost stared at the elevator floor with a sad, reminiscent smile, “Anyway, one day, as I was getting close to the river we use after getting a surplus of berries from our usual bush, I heard low growling from across. I stopped immediately in my tracks, refusing any nerve or jitter that would potentially expose me. In my town, I learned the dangers of the creatures in the woods and the things to do if you were ever to encounter one.

Number one: stop what you are doing immediately

Number two: move in slow, steady movements if you need to.

Number three: stay out of sight.”

Everyone looks in deep intrigue, except The Girl whose gaze goes back and forth from the floor, to The Ghost, and to the door.

The Ghost continues, “Since it was mandatory to embed those rules to my core, I continued to move slow and steady. The townsfolk needed more fish and berries than ever since The Depression started. So I knew I had no choice but to move. But then, as if whatever was on the other side noticed my every move, the growling came closer. I again stopped my movements. The growling grew relentless and echoed like surround sound. I looked across the river and a monstrous figure hid in the shadows. But, a glint of sunlight broke through the trees on both of our sides, so I was able to see its grimy brown fur and a little of its black soul-crushing eyes. Nonetheless, I could tell the creature could see some of me too. I guess that was all it needed to see before pouncing out of the shadows and splashing in the river. It kept coming toward me and I was too in shock to scream or panic, but my breath and heartbeat ran rapidly.

Finally, after causing a scene and most likely killing the fish I needed, the creature was exposed fully in the sunlight. It was standing on two legs and

stood at about seven feet tall, yet it still eyed me as if we were on the same level. I saw you fully in the light of day and you saw me. I didn't even realize I wasn't breathing until I started to get dizzy, but I just thought the dizziness was out of fear. Looking back on it, it was definitely a mix of both. I fell down and crawled backwards still keeping eye contact with the creature. I whimpered, pleaded, and sobbed silently. The creature followed me forward as I pleaded yet again,"

The Ghost clinches its eyes, unable to escape the old memories of the tragedy, "You heard me pleading and crying, yet you came closer and closer. There was nowhere for me to run. I was hopeless. Sooner than later, I was backed up to a tree and the creature was walking up to me growling more fiercely. I winced while accepting my fate at the same time. But that's when you stopped. You were still looking at me like we could see eye-to-eye, but something about the way you looked at me was sad. I don't know how to explain it, but it seemed as if we were both helpless and hopeless. Like there was nowhere to run from ourselves. For a sliver of a second, I saw humanity. But a sliver of poison is all it takes to kill you."

An imaginary pin drop falls throughout the entire elevator. The Ghost looks in physical and mental pain reminiscing, The One-Eyed Person looks like they are in a daze, The Girl buries her head back into her knees as The Demon keeps its arm around her, and The Monster silently sobs. The Ghost hears The Monster's sobs, lets out a quivering sigh, and reluctantly floats to The Monster's back. Although it lacks physicality to comfort, its presence is still noticed.

"I'm so sorry," The Monster spoke through its tears, "I didn't mean to do that to you. I'm so sorry."

The Ghost lightly chuckles, "You know? Our minds can mold and break things at any given time. Especially when it comes to trauma. Our minds

spare those traumatic feelings when it comes to the truth to keep you sane.” The Ghost pauses as its body and voice begins to tremble, “So even if I’m no longer alive, even if I can never go back to my town and help during The Depression, I wouldn’t dare allow anyone or anything to go insane.”

Just then, The Monster turns around to face The Ghost while letting out a voluminous, bottled-up sob. It continues to apologize over and over again as The Ghost releases old memories and emotions through transparent tears.

“It’s going to be okay.” The Ghost declares as more tears stream down. The two of them cry out their emotions while uniting through trauma. A moment of humanity.

The One-Eyed Person sniffs as a single tear comes out of their single eye, “So beautiful.”

“Seriously?” The Demon rolls its eyes. The Girl makes a sound: it is either a chuckle or a sneeze. Regardless, The Demon looks down at her and smiles.

DING!

The elevator begins shaking erratically causing the random patrons brought together by fate to tumble and lose their balance.

“Whoa, this elevator is hella unstable.” The One-Eyed Person laughs nervously. The Monster and The Ghost laugh along with anxiety as the elevator continues its unstable rattle.

The Girl slowly rises her head as if something is taking over her as she rests her chin on her hands. The Demon gazes at The Girl, then at everyone, and then back to The Girl frantically.

“You don’t have to do this.” The Demon whispers to The Girl, but the whisper is loud enough for everyone to hear.

“She doesn’t have to do what?” The Monster is the first to question. Everyone is now eyeing The Girl and The Demon in suspicion. The Girl remains motionless as The Demon begins to sweat.

“Come to think of it,” The Ghost chimes in, “the two of you have been close ever since you got on. Do you two know each other?”

“Come on, man! If y’all got a lil love story goin on, you can tell us.” The One-Eyed Person jokes and laughs to ease the incoming tension. The Demon keeps a calm, collected persona, but the facade begins to crack as it panics on the inside. The Girl’s expression becomes more rigid in internal anger as something gold flickers in The Girl’s eyes. The Demon is the only one close enough to notice.

“What?” The Demon lifts its arm off The Girl studying her in confusion and fear.

“You heard me!” The Ghost hollers, “Do the two of you know each other?”

“Yes! No! UGH!” The Demon yells in frustration as it alters its focus to The Girl who has become unrecognizable. She resembles nothing of the girl who first entered the elevator at the beginning of the night. The already lost luster is even more lost and it seems as if the color in her body is starting to fade.

“Listen to me,” The Demon scurries from beside The Girl and is now in front of her, “don’t do this. It’ll change you. Forever. There won’t be any going back. You won’t be able to come back home.”

The words spoken cause The Girl’s expression to soften as she stares at The Demon. In response, The Demon smiles with a hint of somber and grabs The Girl’s hand. The Girl becomes transfixed again as a single tear falls out of her eye.

“I know you’re not deaf,” The Monster bellows, “you’re being disrespectful. Now, answer the damn question!”

The incoming tension that was trying to be avoided arrives in a non-stop motion. The Monster and The Ghost close in on The Girl and The Demon as

The One-Eyed Person shrugs and tries to mellow out, lighting a blunt. The Girl snaps out of The Demon's trance and notices how horrifying The Monster and The Ghost are up close. She gasps and turns away, holding her head with her hands and clenching her eyes closed.

"Guys, STOP! You're scaring her!" The Demon exclaims.

"You can't ignore us!" The Monster and The Ghost say in unison. The elevator rattles more and more as if it could break any minute now. The One-Eyed Person leans into the furthest corner as they exhale their puff. They look over at the commotion on the other side with a blank, numb stare and rotates the opposite way.

"STOP IT!" The Demon yells louder while standing and defending in front of The Girl. Increased calamity and chaos ensues like before as the elevator rattles, The One-Eyed Person gets more high, The Monster and The Ghost roars and becomes a more fearsome version of themselves, and The Demon yells at The Monster and The Ghost to stand back. Suddenly, The Girl relaxes her muscles and starts to stand upright. The world stops.

"No." The Girl speaks.

dInG!

The elevator dings in distortion as the doors open. On the other side is a regular hotel floor but with a green and purple portal in the middle. The portal has swallowed most of the hotel doors except for two as it warbles and becomes hungrier and larger. The Girl has a dead expression on her face as she steps off the elevator foot by foot. All of the creatures look at her with a mix of bewilderment and fear, unable to process what exactly is going on. The Girl walks closer and closer to the portal before coming to a halt.

“You don’t scare me. None of you do.” The Girl’s voice shakes as she talks, looking down at the hand The Demon grabbed. A chilling wind brushes The Girl’s back which persuades her to look behind at the open elevator...

No one is inside. Everyone has disappeared.

The Girl releases a sigh so ice-cold smoke escapes her mouth. With nothing holding her back, not even herself, she steps into the portal to be anew.