

ELEVATOR JOKE



STORY

HEAD



*"My way
of joking
is to tell
the truth:
it is the
funniest
joke in the
world."*

G. B. Shaw

When Katy left him he wasn't the same guy. That's what some people said. He was changed. On the elevator at the office downtown he used to be such a hit. The secretaries loved him, the executives admired him. He more than got along. He was a young guy, 26 years old, good looking too, and of course these characteristics contributed to his effect. Being smart didn't hurt matters either, but knowing he had such good effect on these people, well that positively helped. That was his ace in the hole, or so people said.

Anyway, every morning the elevator would crowd up with people. Jammed packed. The boss of course was always the first one on because everyone else made way for him. He was the big boss, made you feel it too. He was sixty something, had gray hair, wore the best suits. When he stared at you, it made you nervous, and sometimes if you were having a bad day you'd turn your eyes away from his. All the other people: execu-

tives, clerks, support staff crowded on after him. George, he was always running through the lobby—his tie tossing behind him, his heels click clacking on the polished marble floors and echoing off the vaulted ceilings, as the elevator door was closing. Inevitably his toe would come squeezing in between the doors popping them open, and there he was—sweating, smiling, charming and late. He'd wink to one of the secretaries, he'd say hi to the big boss in an off handed way, then he'd say hello to everyone else, Larry, Edwin, Paulette, Wendy. . .

He loosened thing up in there. People liked him for it. That elevator would have



been a dreadful place otherwise, everyone quiet, careful, suspicious. Fact is, even though it was a modern elevator, it still took time to get to the 77th floor, maybe a minute and a half, maybe two minutes tops. It was during this time when George really shone.

You see, he could tell a joke like nobody else's business, and he did. It was so people expected it of him. Oh, no one can say for sure when this "tradition" began. In fact most of the people who now rode this elevator were not the original people. You know how it is at a place like this, a large office building down town, rumor gets around, some faces vanish, new ones appear. A loyal following developed. It became the trendy elevator to ride. Even the big boss called it "George's Elevator."

It only took a few seconds to get the hello's done with. By the tenth floor George would have fielded requests, and by the forty second floor he'd deliver the punch line. If you got off at the twenty third floor, then you waited before you got off, rode the elevator to the 77th floor to hear George through, and took the elevator back down to the twenty third. If that kind of thing wasn't for you, then you took a different elevator.

There were no stops until floor 77 on this one.

"Hey George, tell the one about the hillbilly in a space shuttle"

"No, not that one, say how the barber got lynched shaving the wrong man, Rex here, hasn't heard that one yet."

"Wait, we're already passing the twenty third floor tell us about the howling balls, state troopers and the butter truck..."

Already people would be laughing because the memory of these jokes and how George told them was so hilarious.



Sure, there would be a few people who wouldn't know what was so funny about this joke or that one, but it was great to have them along too. They made everybody laugh even harder. It was really great, all those people in the elevator, crammed up, trying to get a breadth, the secretaries and the big wigs alike facing the front of the elevator, and George with his narrow shoulders, blue sports jacket, and large hands facing them like a preacher delivering a sermon:

Alleluia!

Repeat after me.
Glory be!

Glory Be!

To the president!

The president!

Glory to the Pope!

The Pope!

Glory to the boss!

Boss!

And glory to God,
may he kill all three
and set us free!

Then the big guy
in the back, you
know, everybody
would be real quiet,
nervous almost,
waiting to see if
George had crossed
the line, but the big
boss would surprise



everybody. He'd open his mouth and start laughing. "And glory be to George! You crack me up!" Everybody got a real kick out of George's jokes, and maybe the boss, the big guy, he may have even liked George's sense of humor most.

Well that day after Katy left him, he wasn't such a hit. They were all ready as usual, crowded onto the elevator. Here comes George



walking, there may be even a slight stoop to his walk, but as of yet, nobody notices a difference in his attitude. When he gets on the elevator, he drops his head to the ground as if ignoring everybody. Meanwhile, the folks in the elevator are anticipating a great joke. The big boss even brought his nephew in from New York so that he could witness the proceedings on George's elevator and tell everybody back in the big Apple all about this George and his elevator. Well anyway, that day, George turns around to face them and begins to tell them a story. There are no hello's today, no requests are fielded. It's just George and this story that he tells straight faced, there's even a hint of sadness in his voice, but it's difficult to catch this because people's minds are already somewhere else, they're wondering how his punch line is going to end up. A moment passes. George clears his throat, then begins.



Once upon a time, George says, there was this very beautiful woman—almost as beautiful as Annette in the corner of this elevator. . . . Everybody turns to look at Annette. She's a secretary, wearing a mini-skirt, and she is indeed very beautiful. Annette blushes, looks at George, hopes he'll go on with the story. Anyway, George continues, many men, as you might expect were in love with this beautiful woman. For a long time she could be seen around town some-times with one man some-times with another



It made a man feel lucky to be in her presence, like he was something special to be with such a beautiful woman. Funny thing is, you could see this was so by the way these men behaved around her. They were brighter, more charming. The stories they told were funnier. It was like they achieved their full potential as human beings around her. She was known then as Mother Kate. Invariably, though, she'd love one guy then move onto another. She didn't seem able to stay with anybody very long. It was almost like she was distracted. Or maybe it was just because there were so many men out there who needed her attention. In any event she wouldn't let herself be tied down. So it went for many years. And as time passed she became more beautiful, the list of men who'd fallen hopelessly in love with her only grew heavy with the weight of their broken hearts. One day, though, was different. It was the day tables were turned on her and she fell unexpectedly, hopelessly in love with a younger man who worked in a bank. Much later, after the two lovers had grown comfortable around each other, they would talk about that fateful rainy day, and how they met on a street corner while she was flagging a cab. Who would have thought, the beautiful woman would reminisce, that I could have stumbled upon such love and that an umbrella, the fact that you had one and I didn't, would play such a role in bringing our separate



destinies together as one! The beautiful woman laughed as she said destiny for that's how she felt ever since she met this young banker, like being in love with him was a major part of her destiny. The man of course, was different. He was non-committal, sus-



picious even. He sensed that her love wasn't directed at him, but at the idea that he was a young banker. He was a very practical young man and didn't believe in destiny. He also believed her love wouldn't last. If there was going to be anything like destiny between him and her, he knew it was the kind of destiny that ends badly. For the time being though, he acted like he should act, like he thought she expected him to act. If it wouldn't last, he could at least play off her love to get what he wanted from her. So that's what he did. He invited her to move in with him and try it out before they got married. For a long time it seemed they hardly left the bed. She fed him fruit, he massaged her feet, they were very happy. One day though, because the young banker was practical and possessed a suspicious mind, he suggested something to the beautiful woman that on the surface may seem completely preposterous. He wanted to know if this beautiful woman, as faithful as she said she was, would ever fool around on him. So he asks her one morning when they're getting up from bed, he says: Katherine, I want you to sleep with my friend Charley Wates. The beautiful woman is just putting her clothes on when he asks this. The young banker was helping her strap her bra on. She stopped what she was doing.

What!

I want you to do Charley. I want you to do him right here in this bed, with me watching.

You want me to "DO" Charley Waters? She asked looking a little confused. What does that mean!

I want you to have sex with him. I want you to do it here, so I can watch. I want to know if you would fool around on me.

You want me to do Charley? She asked again, trying to make sure she understood the young banker correctly.

Yes, I want you to do him here.

While you watch.

Yes. While I watch. He waited for an answer. He thought, if she says yes, then I'm right, she doesn't love me like she says she does, but if she says no, then I know I have a woman who really loves me for what I am.

Alright, she says, suddenly, a little sadly. I'll do Charley Waters right here, while you watch. Tonight, after you come home from work.

Tonight, the young banker said zipping her blouse and suddenly feeling very sad as well, alright.

But all that day the young banker was troubled. It bothered him not so much that the beautiful woman agreed to sleep with his friend, but that she agreed so willingly, without the slightest argument. She didn't even seem to want to know why the young banker had proposed the idea in the first place. It seemed strange.

That night as he drove home, the young banker made an important decision. He was going to sit down and have a long talk with this beautiful woman. He wanted to explain to her how strange her reaction was. He might even suggest she see a psychoanalyst. Maybe then, after this was all cleared up, they would marry. When he pulled up into the driveway that night, he couldn't wait to have this whole affair behind him. He opened the door to his house with a sense of anticipation, and yelled: Honey. But she was gone. There wasn't a trace of her left behind, except for the faint smell of her body in the bed sheets, and the mattress which still seemed warm with her departed love. . .

George stopped there. He didn't move. Everybody in the elevator was silent. "Can you believe that story," he said. Still everybody was silent, they didn't know what to make of this story, whether it was a joke or not. "The kicker is," George continued, "I'm the young banker. Yesiree, yours truly—George."

Suddenly the bell rang at the 44th floor. The big man in the back, opened his mouth and started laughing. Then the nephew broke out laughing, then Annette, then Larry, Edwin, Paulette, Wendy. By the 77th floor everyone in the elevator was cracking up. It was George's most hilarious joke. It was a coup that would be talked about forever. Those one or two people who didn't laugh because they didn't think the joke was funny, well they could swear George was never the same guy again.

The End



She's dead
long dead.
Maybe a week,
probably longer.
We stumbled upon her
shuffling off into an alley
one night
after drinking too much beer.
I stood poised near the dumpster
fly undone
when I began to stroll it
then I turned my eyes
to where she was propped in the doorway.
At first I didn't know
if it was a bar or a bin,
or even if it was a person or a dog.
We pulled the blankets away
one by one
until her face
flaccid and black
tumbled suddenly into view
and with the rest of the dead lump
fell onto the alleystones with a thud.
That's what we remember most
the stench too
and opening her mouth to check for gold teeth
like they did in old war documentaries.



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