

“Hold the elevator, please.” A thin, high, disembodied voice floated into the car.

Jessica held the door open to an elderly woman wearing a bright green coat and carrying a shopping bag and a large red tote. Chic black boots encased the woman’s tiny feet. While the rest of her was stylish, her hair was unlike anything Jessica had ever seen. Orange, in a shade not found in nature, and piled on top of her head in a huge beehive. Gold-framed cats-eye glasses completed a look right out of the sixties.

Jessica realized her mouth was open as she stared at the woman. She clamped her mouth shut.

The woman smiled at her. The elevator doors swooshed closed. No one else had gotten in. Strange, Jessica thought again.

The elevator passed the seventh floor without stopping and continued its slow descent. At the sixth floor it lumbered to a stop and the doors slid open.

The handsome stranger who’d helped her by the perfume counters slipped into the car. Recognition lit his features and he gave Jessica another curl-her-toes smile. “Hello again.”

“Hello,” she managed to croak out.

The doors closed and the car began its downward descent. The only occupants were Jessica, the elderly woman and the hot guy. Jessica frowned. Where was everyone? The store was jammed with holiday shoppers.

“Looks like we’ve got the car to ourselves,” Handsome said. His gaze swept Jessica, making her fidget. Did she have food on her face, the remnants of the hot dog with mustard she’d grabbed from a street vendor? It would be just her luck to meet a smokin’ hot guy and have mustard on her face.

She cast a quick glance at his third finger, left hand. No ring. The absence of a ring meant nothing, she reminded herself. Yet, a little kernel of optimism blossomed.

“You bought shoes too?” the woman asked, pulling Jessica’s attention.

Jessica nodded, noticing the woman carried a bag from the shoe department. “I like your boots. Did you buy new shoes for yourself?”

“Not today. I bought a pair for my goddaughter,” the old woman said.

“Lucky goddaughter.”

“Yes, she is.” The woman shot her a sly grin.

The elevator moved slowly, too slowly. A prickly feeling ran up Jessica’s spine and made her shiver. Something was wrong. They passed the fifth floor without stopping. When they reached the fourth floor, she moved back, expecting the elevator to stop, but it kept going.

“Did you buy a new suit?” the elderly woman asked Handsome, with a nod to the garment bag he carried.

“I picked up a tux I had altered.” He grimaced. “I need it for a charity event. I don’t mind the charity so much, but I prefer more casual settings.” He looked at Jessica and smiled. “I’d rather spend a quiet evening in front of a fire with a pretty woman.”

Jessica’s pulse fluttered. Damn, he was gorgeous. Close-fitting indigo jeans showcased long legs. His black sweater and black leather jacket, along with the light golden stubble along his jawline, made him look like a modern-day pirate. Would he steal her heart? Where had that come from? The closed space of the elevator must be addling her brain. Men like him didn’t exist in real life. At least not in her life.

At the third floor, Jessica again prepared for a rush of shoppers. But the elevator continued its slow descent. Why was this taking so long, and why hadn’t it stopped?

A loud screech broke the silence and the car lurched to a halt, throwing Jessica against

the wall. The elderly woman tumbled to the floor. Then all was still and quiet. Jessica's heart pounded and a rushing noise filled her head.

The good-looking guy hurried over to the elderly woman and helped her up. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, dearie. See to this young lady here."

He turned to Jessica, his forehead furrowed. "Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine," she choked out.

"It'll be okay," he said, looking from one woman to the other. "I'll call for help." He pushed the red alarm button. No alarm sounded. A phone for emergency calls hung on the wall. He picked up the receiver, listened, then frowned and put it back into its cradle. He reached into his jacket pocket, pulled out his cell, and tapped the screen.

He stared at it, then looked at Jessica. "No alarm bell, the elevator phone is dead, and I can't get service on my cell."

"You're kidding." With shaking hands, she dug into her purse and grabbed her own phone. No service either. She fought the fear gnawing inside her. She hated closed spaces.

"We're stuck?" the older woman asked. Despite her words, her voice was calm.