

HIGH ABOVE

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EXT. CITY - AFTERNOON

Another time, another world. A medieval old town surrounded by a sprawling futuristic metropolis. Far above the cramped rooftops and urban smog rises a lone bell tower - the city's most famous tourist attraction.

A small elevator trundles up one side, bearing several cramped occupants to the summit.

INT. ELEVATOR

A FAMILY OF THREE and an OLDER COUPLE peer out of the elevator's glass wall, craning to see the city disappearing beneath them.

In the center of the lift stands a man - PETER STEPANSON, early 30s, journalist, wearing yesterday's clothes. Eyes closed, green around the gills - terrified of heights.

A young ELEVATOR OPERATOR, late teens, tugs an aging lever as they reach the top of the tower.

The elevator clangs to a halt. Doors open.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
(overly cheerful)
Have a great day!

A chorus of "thanks" and "you toos" as the riders depart. Peter exits last, looking away from the drop below, queasy.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Not a fan of heights, sir?

Peter steps to the safety of solid ground.

PETER
On a scale of one to ten, how much
do you care that I have a great
day?

The operator gives this stranger a blank look.

PETER (CONT'D)
How many times a shift do you say
that?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
About a million. But I mean it.

PETER
How old are you?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
Nineteen.

PETER
University?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
Night classes.

They regard each other for a long beat.

PETER
Doesn't it irk you? Spouting fake
pleasantries all day?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
I don't mind. It takes two seconds
and it makes people feel special.

PETER
It feeds into a society of
falsehoods. You don't mind being a
cog...in a machine of lies?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
Have you been talking to Surly
George?

PETER
Who?

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
That old hippie who sits on the
bench below. He's always yelling
stuff like that. But - no, it's my
job and I like getting paid, and it
makes people happy.
(pointedly, at Peter)
Most people, anyways.

PETER
But don't you ever want to tell
people to go screw themselves?

The operator looks tempted.

PETER (CONT'D)
(spreading his arms,
baiting him)
Go on then. Give it a try. C'mon,
c'mon...

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
I'd rather not. I'm meant to be
polite to tourists.

PETER
I'm not a tourist! I'm a local. I'm
up here in the middle of a work day
because yesterday, I blew up my
entire career in the span of two
lousy hours. That's me. How about
you?

The operator shifts on his feet. Uncomfortable. And then:

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
My legs hurt. And I'm hungry. And I
think my girlfriend is cheating on
me.

PETER
Too bad, man. The only thing I've
got left is my old lady. True blue
to the end. But seriously - why
pretend like everything's fine if
it's not? C'mon - give it to me.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
I hope your day gets better.

Peter glares. The operator shrugs.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR (CONT'D)
I don't wanna spread bad vibes.
Isn't being nice worth *something*?

PETER
Is it?

The operator stands there, gathers up his courage.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR
Is this how you blew up your career
in two hours?

Long beat. Peter takes this in.

PETER

Ouch. Very nice. That's more like it.

A buzzer goes off in the elevator.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR

I got people waiting at the bottom.

As the doors begin to close, the operator forces them open.

ELEVATOR OPERATOR (CONT'D)

My girlfriend's definitely cheating on me.

Doors close once and for all. Peter stands there alone.

PETER

(to himself)

Yeah, kid. Mine too.

END