

L. E. D. by Florence Dawes

My eyes shudder, from the heaviness—I just got here but I am zoning out – I come back to life as I look up from the check-in station keyboard. The red LED above the clock facing me shuts off. I can see the reflection in the clock, of the LED behind me went as well. My phone switches back to work-mode and locks me out, blocking me access to my family at home. The light shutting off is accompanied by an anonymous buzzer. Which rings my ears for ten seconds. This signals it was officially 8:05 in the morning. There were four clocks, each designated to a check-in room wall. While the long hands met the ones. I cannot shake it, my inability to focus during our morning lecture.

My mom is at home, and I still miss my father. He worked day-in and day-out.

I replaced him when he was let go, the last day I saw him.

Heading to my route, I walk by another delivery person; *they must have just finished their shift* I think. We do not know each other. Due to a lack of time, which I assume is the same for them -- *the exhaustion goes both ways.*

As a carrier my task is to deliver material, envelopes, folders, documented 'Orders,' whatever it is I have reached 4000 pieces today. Yesterday I had 3999. That is the conditions of the position, when I finish my shift earlier, it sets an expectation. The grueling, repetition and consistent walking and running means, I want to put the work behind me as it comes up.

As I make my way to the elevator, I put my uniform on, tucking my neatly fitted shirt under my belt, and fastening my loose cuffs, so that my sleeves flush with my wrists. About halfway down the hall, I button my collar, and I look down at the corridors below. This route is on the 20th floor, and I see the other delivery personnel beneath me making their way, taking parallel strides. I wonder *what is it like the other districts?*

The carpet under my feet softens my hardened, precise steps - before I hit a right turn, toward the elevator. Pivoting and facing down a shorter hallway. The elevator's entrance straight ahead on the back wall, is obstructed – by another person's presence. And my face almost hit between his shoulders as I turned the corner.

“Umm” I say to his back.

He does not flinch, or he does not notice me.

Is he shaking? It's odd. I think.

Where is the elevator?

The man in front of me is staring at the cords protruding from the abyss like elevator shaft.

He is thinking the same thing.

Where is the elevator?

He is shaking, it is almost unnoticeable. But I am rarely this still. I am working after all. It is much more apparent to me, he is trembling.

His nerves are non-manageable, and I should call this in.

Glancing down at my secured outfit. *My work clothes are part of me* and without sharing words between the two of us - I reach for my badge, which sits in front of my heart. The man remained wordless, until I pressed in on the singular, centralized star-shaped button of my Citizens Badge.

He whimpers before pleading “Please do—n’t, I need, I need to start work.”

No longer shaking and without turning his body or head the man says, “put your badge down, please, we can go together.”

The elevator screeches for a few seconds in front of the man. And I push him into it, without a second thought.

Suddenly, he is on the floor of the hoisted platform, and we are speeding upward.

“I can’t be late.” I mutter instinctively while towering over his large, feeble body.

Now enclosed in the moving box, the door cutout revealed an occasional red LED descending in a flash, as we travelled upward. The LEDs as we passed were the only way to see the elevator room. As well as my brain filling in the dark spaces.

Reorienting my focus, *how are there are two desks* I think to myself.

The rust scattered desks were positioned parallel to each other. *His* desk I presume, is identical to mine. Besides, mine has its label displaying my number, 20.010. Which rested above the slots - the rusted slots segmented the route by location.

The strange man stood to regain his stature; I turned to face him. Looking up to meet eyes with him.

He looks rugged, unkept – *unpleasant, for a National Servant, such as a Carrier.*

The clock behind him - like a waning moon refocuses into my blood-shot view. Rushing around the man, I snatch the papers from the top drawer of my desk and begin *finally* making headway.

As I work, my actions are informed by the clicking of the pressured cords pulling the elevator. The sound replaces the ticking hands of clocks throughout the offices. Like a subconscious countdown, to the screeching of the elevator cord - as it brakes on my destination.

By my estimation, the time is now 8:17, and the screeching would begin at 8:29. At which point I have less than 2 seconds before the elevator speeds back up to the next floor. The elevator does not stop for long, not enough to consider otherwise - most days I am not sure it stops at all.

Aided by my badges light, I place each letter in its correlated address-slot. I set it to automatically activate between the red lights. The strobing keeps me alert as I read and place each letter.

I read,

[4848 Determination Hwy, Floor 20.010, Earth 1.](#)

The letter was addressed to an Officer of the ORDER, each floor has them.

I have never seen any of their letters, *this must be the additional piece today, the 4000th.* I put it on the third shelf of six, in the middle of the section, untouched by oxidation.

Then back to recycling the familiar pieces to different businesses.

After ten minutes. (600 ticks and light transitions later) - I have 3 minutes remaining until my departure for the elevator.

“Done,” congratulating myself and feeling relieved, an impressed grin overtakes my face. Feeling justified, I take a moment to eat.

Breaking open the front pocket of my carrier bag reveals a bag of steamed rice and spiced pigeon. The heat-bag activated by fracturing the warmer inside. With a twist and a loud snap, I pop the heated bag open. I pull the utility stick from my bag. And flick out the retractable spork from the stick’s handle. The steam dances out of the bag before gravity pulls it out of the open wall. The elevator’s rattle causes the rice and protein mix to shake into clumps. Exposing more seasoned, seared meats hidden in the rice. The aroma replaces the rust and dense dust of the room and outer tunnel. The high notes from the powdered peppers begin to spark my nostril hairs. Leaving a linger of sweetness from the caramelized onion, accented by pungent garlic powder - which blackened the cooked bird bits.

“Fuck!” I yell, startled after looking up to see the man hovering above me.

I forgot the stranger was in here. His desk was empty too, and all he was holding was a clipboard. And a stack of papers that challenged the clip’s ability to hold it. He writes on the top page, aided by his own badge light.

His pen was... *National Blue*.

Is this a test? I think before he speaks.

Clearly reading from the paper in front of him “You are sentenced to trial,” he coughs twice looking at me directly and shrugging, “trial means it’s tough, or challenging.”

Sinching his face as if to apologize for the discomfort I was feeling.

He continues “You, Tavi Q’inton, are terminated from your position as of this moment,.”

He flips to the next page.

“Your new work position will begin at 9:00am sharp.”

He mouths, “3, 2, 1.”

He speaks loudly over the 8:30 alarm. “In 30 minutes – Congratulations on becoming a Slacker, your new worksite is on floor 200.010 and you will be relocated.”

The alarm rings stop.

“Nonnegotiable order directly from an Officer of the ORDER. Identification Number 20.010. Solace Finsht” he finishes, officially.

Distraught and trapped, I feel myself suffocating.

What was I being accused of? what was the significance of trial? This man was an officer?

I glanced at his pen; I know that blue. My stomach continues to drop.

“What is a slacker? What will I be doing?” I ask the *ugly* man as if summoning his stop.

With enough time for him to step off, he departs the elevator replying, “picking up our slack.”

Moments later with a screech I pass my route level alone; *the elevator was late* I think before connecting the dot.

I was late.

Sitting there with my lukewarm rice meal with a direct order, I waited for my new floor.
200.010.

The room became pitch black in my paralysis. The LEDs were not lit this far up, and the room was noticeably barren to sound, even clicking. The dust was denser around me, with a suffocating heat. My sweat was evaporating before its blissful cooling could be felt.

Arriving at my new floor, a faint buzzer rang from below, as it became 9:00am.

THE END.