Close

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For my wife, Cherry Gagni

You'll forever be my muse.

"Open your eyes! You're free!"

"No!"

"Open your eyes!"

"I said 'No!'"

I had to respond in the same manner… with utmost fervor. It had been like that for the past few seconds. Me, competing against that other voice inside my head. Like a devil's advocate, it taunted me… Teased me to open my eyes even though I can't… Knowing full well that if I opened my eyes and saw that I'm still inside that enclosed space of the elevator… I might die.

I don't really mind the noise of the men and women around me… chirping about like birds in a feeding frenzy. Just not that maddening voice inside me… Not "him"!

The two guys who were standing right in front of me sounded like rich guys talking about rich guy stuff. Wine, women, sports car… it only took a few minutes for them to talk about those three. It's either they really know about them or they really know how to brag… loudly.

But they didn't really matter to the two women with whom I'm sandwiched in between of. The loud conversation of the two "rich" guys didn't bother them. Nor did it bother them that they were talking about sensitive and extremely personal stuff with me standing between them. But it bothered me a bit… it really did.

Just as one of the women was about to finish her litany regarding the other woman's infidelity, an ominous voice popped inside my brain once again.

"Open your eyes! You're free!"

It was the same taunting voice yet commanding voice that had continued to tease me since minutes ago.

"Open your eyes!"

The good half of my brain screamed back, "No!" But the bad half obediently whispered "Yes…" and forced my eyes open.

Only then did I realize my mistake… That bad once inside me tricked me once again, as it had countless times. I was still inside the elevator and it was still packed with people… noisy, nauseating people!

In that moment of panic, I quickly closed my eyes again and tried to focus on happy thoughts.

"Think happy thoughts… Think happy thoughts…" I told myself over and over again. I tried to focus my brain to an image of a green meadow… The clear blue sky above it… The wind blowing through the grass blissfully… The brown fence surrounding the meadow… The chime on top of its gate that went…

"Bing!"

My eyes quickly opened at the sound… it marked the end of someone's journey and hopefully my ticket to freedom from this hellhole. The elevator doors opened with a slight hiss and several people got off, including the two "rich" guys in front of me. Finally, there was an opening wide enough for me to squeeze through.

I tried to step forward but I didn't move at all. I tried once more but I still failed to move even an inch.

"Move!" a caring but forceful voice shouted inside my brain.

"You can't… You're stuck!" mocked another.

I fought hard to move my feet but they seem to be stuck to the floor. And it left me locked in place at the back elevator… behind the thinning crowd of people… and between the two loud women who moved slightly forward.

"Going up." said a womanly yet robotic voice. "Doors closing," it declared as the elevator moved up again.

I closed my eyes once more to fight off the fear and anxiety that came to me. Although the crowded elevator has eased to give more room for each occupant, I still found it hard to breathe. It's as if my lungs were being crushed by two iron hands. The non-stop babbling of the two women between me finally rattled my head. I could no longer ignore their loud voices and soon felt irritated by it.

"Open your eyes!"

The voice taunted me again.

"Open your eyes and tell them to shut up!"

"No!" I once again retorted to that voice. I knew I needed to fight it off so I focused my mind on happy thoughts… Of a green meadow… The clear blue sky above it… The wind blowing through the grass blissfully… The brown fence surrounding the meadow… The chime on top of its gate that went…

"Bing!"

I wanted to open my eyes again to that sound as it seemed to declare that I'm free to leave. But then I heard that taunting voice once again as it shouted to me "Now, open your eyes!"

What do I do? Oh what do I do?

"Open your eyes! You're free!"

This was just a trick. In my heart and in my mind, I knew it. I strongly believe that there was no chime. That other voice in my head was just trying to trick me into thinking that the elevator doors have opened. Coz I knew that when I opened my eyes, the doors won't be open… leaving me vulnerable again… open to another burst of panic attack.

It won't happen again.

As I eased my closed eyes and closed mind into another happy thought, the feeling all around me seemed to change. It seemed lighter and quieter. It's as if the two women between me were…

"Gone!"

I opened my eyes again and found myself all alone inside the elevator. It has reached the 70th floor and all my companions have all gotten off.

"Level 70. This is my stop." I realized with a sense of relief. A smile broke through my once tense face as I stepped towards the elevator doors… towards the end of my nightmarish 5-minute elevator ride that felt like a lifetime. I barely made it into my second step when I heard that familiar sound of a chime.

"Bing!"

The elevator must have been idle for quite some time while I stood there with my eyes closed. And it finally thought that no one else was getting off.

"Wait! I am getting off!" I shouted. It wasn't just inside my head but it made its way out of my mouth as a desperate cry for help!

"Bing!" The chime went off again. I once welcomed it as a sign of my freedom and peace of mind. But that second chime meant that it was about to move in the other direction… Into another 5-minute ride on this small elevator… Into another nightmarish ride that could feel like a lifetime… It was about to move…

"Going down," the woman's robotic voice now sounded more ominous.

Now, more than ever, I have to move quickly and run out of this elevator before I once again be damned…

"Doors closing", the voice declared once again as the elevator doors closed with a slight hiss.

"Damn!"

About the Author

Though the author spent his 10-year career working as an IT professional, he always had a passion for writing. During that period, he wrote poems for his wife. He also went on to write some short stories and essays for a blog. When his wife received information about sites that offer self-publishing, it renewed the "writing flame" inside of him, triggering him to refurbish three of his surviving works and self-publish them. That compilation was what he published thru self-publishing sites, most recently with Lulu.com, which the author hoped to share with a lot more people… along with the new short stories and the novella he recently finished writing.