

# Locked In

Locked In

Marcus was 43, behind on sleep, and stuck in a stairwell.

It was the kind with no windows and no cell signal-just cold concrete, rusted rails, and

That makes you think too long about your breath.

He'd just dropped off his third delivery of the night. The customer said to leave it at the door  
behind him on the 4th-floor landing.

No one answered when he knocked.

No one picked up the number on the delivery receipt.

And now it was nearly midnight, and his phone had 7% battery.

He sat on the step and sighed. Not out of panic-he'd seen worse and slept in worse.  
frustrating.

He had rent due next week.

His kid's birthday is in two days.

And this stairwell was eating up time and tips.

He noticed the shape slouched in the corner near the door.

Someone was wrapped in a blanket. Hood up.

Still. Silent.

Marcus tensed a little, then relaxed.

?You good??

The person didn't move at first.

Then a quiet voice:

?Been better.?

The guy's name was Reggie. Mid-50s, maybe. Thin. Layers of clothes on like armor.

"Better than outside," he said, eyes tired but still sharp.

Marcus nodded. "You stay in here all night?"

Reggie nodded. "Sometimes I talk to God just to hear my voice bounce back."

They both laughed.

They talked in short bursts.

About cold floors.

Missed meals.

How the city got louder and meaner after 10 p.m.

And how people treated you differently depending on whether you had a badge, a key.

Marcus offered half of his uneaten dinner-shrimp lo mein and a spring roll still warm from the stove.

Reggie didn't ask questions. Just said, "You sure?" and waited until Marcus nodded.

They ate without speaking for a while.

Then Reggie asked, "Have you ever been broke in spirit? Not just in money, but... he

He tapped his chest with two fingers.

Marcus nodded. "Yeah. Still climbing out."

Reggie smiled. "That's the part people don't see. Not the broke part-but the climb."

He reached into his coat and pulled out a small notebook, pages bent and edges curled.

"I write prayers in here," he said. "But not church ones. Just... things I want to say with

He handed it to Marcus. "Read one."

Marcus hesitated, then flipped to a random page.

"Today I didn't steal anything. I counted that as a tithe."

He looked up, surprised. Reggie just shrugged.

"Gratitude is a kind of wealth, too."

At 1:17 a.m., maintenance finally unlocked the door.

Marcus stood, stretched, and handed Reggie the rest of the spring roll. Then reached

“Won’t fix much,” he said. “But maybe it helps something small.”

Reggie smiled, but didn’t reach for it.

“You already helped something big.”

Marcus folded the bill and slipped it into the edge of the prayer notebook on the floor.

No arguments. No speeches. Just a shared nod.

Back in the car, Marcus plugged in his dying phone.

The last order of the night had canceled.

But in that moment, he didn’t care.

He drove home in silence, headlights painting the road in gold.

And for the first time all week,

He didn’t feel behind.

He felt... caught up.

Not by money,

but by meaning.