

Going Up

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EXT. DORM ELEVATOR - NIGHT

DAN, a Columbia student, walks into the elevator, looking like hell. The doors shut.

INT. DORM ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Dan leans against the wall and starts to doze. The doors open, still on the same floor. Enter a sharp-looking young man in a three-piece SUIT. Stylish shoes. A dark red ROSE, poking out from his breast pocket. He looks at Dan. He looks at the elevator buttons. None of them are lit. Dan makes a disgruntled noise in his sleep. Suit's expression changes very subtly. Then he leans over and presses the button for NINE.

FLASH TO BLACK

The elevator gives an ominous DING.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Dan gets off the elevator on floor nine. He walks toward his room, stepping on a trail of ROSE PETALS on the floor. He unlocks the door and opens it to find Suit sitting on his bed, waiting for him.

DAN
Holy shit!

SUIT
(in a British accent)
You have a cursing problem.

DAN
Who are you?

SUIT
Have a seat.

DAN
Get off my bed.

SUIT
Your sheets are soft.

BEAT.

Suit gets off the bed and moves to the desk chair. Dan rubs his forehead with his fingers. Then he opens the fridge and takes out a LARGE ENERGY DRINK. Takes a sip. Turns around.

(CONTINUED)

DAN
Oh my God.

Dan sits down on the bed.

DAN (CONT'D)
You're still here.

Suit leans forward.

SUIT
You met me at the career fair last week, Dan.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. CAREER FAIR - DAY

Dan, wearing a cheap suit, shakes Suit's hand.

DAN
Nice to meet you! I'm Daniel! I'm an English major!

SUIT
Nice to meet you. I'm Ellington, a managing director at J.P. Morgan.

DAN
Holy shit.

BACK TO PRESENT:

INT. DORM - NIGHT

Dan stands up rather explosively.

DAN
What are you doing in my room?!

ELLINGTON
Now, Dan, let's be reasonable--

DAN
I'm calling campus security!

ELLINGTON
Campus--? (BEAT) Daniel, are you a fucking idiot? Are you seriously going to call campus security to arrest a man in a suit? You're the
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLINGTON (cont'd)
one who looks like a homeless
person, for crying out loud.

DAN
I do not look like a--

ELLINGTON
Shut up, Daniel.

Ellington slumps and rubs his forehead.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
Look, I really didn't want to do
this. Or come here. It's a hard
journey, you know, going up.

DAN
Up?

ELLINGTON
I need your help.

BEAT.

Ellington snaps his fingers.

FLASH TO BLACK

DAN (O.S.)
Holy shit.

EXT. MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS, STREET - NIGHT

Dan and Ellington walk side-by-side.

DAN
How did you do that?

ELLINGTON
Just a trick.

DAN
A tr--?

Ellington snaps his fingers. A piece of tape appears on
Dan's mouth.

ELLINGTON
Souls these days aren't what they
used to be.

(CONTINUED)

DAN
(muffled)
Souls?

ELLINGTON
Yeah. Souls.

BEAT.

Dan takes off the tape.

DAN
Yeah, totally. I mean, hipsters
these days don't even have souls.
And my academic advisor is the most
unhelpful soul I've ever--

Ellington turns to Dan with excitement.

ELLINGTON
Yes! You understand!

DAN
Wait, what--

Ellington makes an expansive gesture.

ELLINGTON
Look at the world. Tell me what you
see.

BEAT.

DAN
A halal cart.

ELLINGTON
Oh, for Pete's sake--

DAN
What?

ELLINGTON
Do better.

DAN
Darkness.

ELLINGTON
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

DAN
Ninjas.

ELLINGTON
Very good.

DAN
Wait, seriously?

ELLINGTON
The point, Daniel, is that you
little people don't see things. You
don't believe in the darkness and
the light. (BEAT) Not until it's
too late.

Ellington snaps his fingers.

FLASH TO BLACK

EXT. LOW STEPS, ALMA MATER - NIGHT

Dan and Ellington stand overlooking campus.

ELLINGTON
Why are you an English major?

DAN
Don't you start giving me crap
about being an English major.

BEAT.

DAN (CONT'D)
I used to write a lot. Stories and
stuff. But I stopped because (BEAT)
you know.

ELLINGTON
Know what?

DAN
I don't have time anymore. I need
to get good grades, find an
internship. You know, turn my hobby
into something that might actually
make me some money.

Dan turns to Alma and pats her foot.

(CONTINUED)

DAN (CONT'D)

You can't just go out and follow
your dreams nowadays, can you,
Alma?

ELLINGTON

Did you just talk to the statue?

DAN

Sometimes I think about what it
might be like to drop out of
college and write books. Sit by a
pond and just write all day, like
Thoreau.

ELLINGTON

Now there's a boring soul if I ever
met one.

DAN

But other times I think to myself,
"who am I fooling?" I'm not a great
writer. I don't have anything
interesting to say. Write books?
(BEAT) I can't do that.

BEAT.

DAN (CONT'D)

I miss it, though. When I'm not
writing, I-- (BEAT) It's hard to
explain.

ELLINGTON

You feel empty inside.

DAN

(surprised)

Yeah.

Ellington looks at Dan sympathetically.

ELLINGTON

Give me your hand.

DAN

Look, no offense, but I don't know
you too well.

ELLINGTON

(muttering)

Bloody hell.

Ellington takes Dan's hand.

(CONTINUED)

FLASH TO BLACK

DAN (O.S.)
Hello? (BEAT) Ellington?

ELLINGTON (O.S.)
Be calm, Dan.

FADE TO:

EXT. LOW STEPS, ALMA MATER - NIGHT

The view of campus is the same. Dan rubs his eyes. Blinks.

DAN
Whoa.

People pass by on campus. Above each person's head is a SERIES OF HEARTS, like the LIFE HEARTS you'd find in a video game. Some people's hearts are more full than others. Some people's hearts are almost empty. No one has a completely full series of hearts.

ELLINGTON
Trust me, the real thing is much worse.

DAN
What do you mean?

ELLINGTON
These shapes--what do you call them--

DAN
Hearts?

ELLINGTON
Yes, these human hearts. They're just a trick, a little trick, to help you understand. With my eyes, I see something much worse.

DAN
What do you see with your eyes?

ELLINGTON
I can't tell you. It's fucking depressing. (BEAT) Anyway, these fleshy things--

(CONTINUED)

DAN
Hearts.

ELLINGTON
--represent each person's life
force. Their will to live.

Dan looks lost.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
For instance, just after having
sex, most people's life forces are
almost completely full.

Dan mouths an "ah."

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
That doesn't happen too often on
this campus.

FLASH TO BLACK

ELLINGTON (O.S.)
Let me show you who I am.

FLASH TO:

MONTAGE - ELLINGTON'S MEMORIES

Ellington opens the door to a Columbia student's dorm.

ELLINGTON (V.O.)
Every night I approach a new soul.

Someone starts screaming.

ELLINGTON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Sometimes it doesn't like me.

Ellington opens the door to another dorm. A shoe gets thrown
at him./His eyes widen. He ducks back out.

ELLINGTON (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That could have gone better./They
really should stop throwing things
at me.

Someone opens yet another door to reveal Ellington sitting
on the bed, smiling nervously.

EXT. COLLEGE WALK - NIGHT

Dan and Ellington walk side-by-side.

ELLINGTON

I don't know how much longer it can
go on. Quite frankly, I'm getting
too old for this shit.

He looks around at the people on campus. They walk past,
oblivious, still with HEARTS above their heads.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)

Going up isn't as easy as it used
to be.

DAN

Who are you?

ELLINGTON

The security guard. The gatekeeper.
The one who sits downstairs, bored
out of his mind.

DAN

I thought you were an investment
banker.

ELLINGTON

Good God, Dan, it was a metaphor.
You're the worst English major I've
ever--

DAN

Why do you need my help?

ELLINGTON

Let's just say that people these
days don't reach their full
potential. They're like ghosts, the
boring kind that drift around, not
scaring anyone. They're no fun to
talk to. The world wears them down.
By the time they come to me,
they're practically nothing.

Ellington looks Dan in the eye.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)

I need you to keep writing. To make
use of your gift.

(CONTINUED)

DAN
I don't have a gift.

ELLINGTON
Oh, but you do!

Ellington throws out his arms. INSPIRATIONAL MUSIC begins to play.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
Everyone has a gift! You little people might not know it yet, but you have the gift of life. Use it! Do something great! Something exciting!

DAN
Where's that music coming from?

The MUSIC stops.

ELLINGTON
Rob a bank. Steal a car. But don't start any wars because wars just make people sad and boring. Do whatever you want to do in what little time you have. Then write a sonnet.

DAN
What does this have to do with anything?

ELLINGTON
I like sonnets.

BEAT.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
Look, Dan, you don't have to sit beside a pond. You're in New York City, for crying out loud. Go to Starbucks like a proper New Yorker and write your damn book there.

DAN
I can't.

ELLINGTON
Why not?

(CONTINUED)

DAN
I don't have time.

ELLINGTON
Time is all you have.

Ellington snaps his fingers.

FLASH TO BLACK

INT. WHITE ROOM

Ellington sits in a chair, a LARGE ENERGY DRINK in his hand.

ELLINGTON
Dan was a good man. He died
yesterday. May his soul rest in
peace.

BEAT.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
That was a joke. Dan is still a
student at Columbia University,
that idiot. I hear he joined a
fiction workshop. Good for him.

Ellington finishes the ENERGY DRINK. Holds out the empty
can. A NINJA comes, takes it from him, and leaves.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
Me, I'm doing fairly well. Still
meeting kids at career fairs. Going
on late-night walks. Most of them
don't remember me the next morning.
Some do.

BEAT.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
I'm tired. I don't know if any of
this will be worth it.

BEAT.

ELLINGTON (CONT'D)
I'm coming for you next.

Ellington snaps his fingers.

FLASH TO BLACK