

Years 7 & 8

1st Place: Tori Bredenhof

Year 8, John Calvin Christian College

The Elevator

The doors were just about to shut when Lauren Jones called out,

“Hold the doors please!”

Lewis White reached out and kept them open as Lauren and Oliver came into the elevator. Oliver’s left arm was bent at an odd angle, his cheeks stained with tears.

“Thank you,” beamed Lauren. “The kid I’m babysitting just fell off his bed – it’s a bunk bed you see, he was on the top – and something happened to his arm. I think it’s broken or something, I don’t really know, I’m not a medical expert or anything . . .”

She trailed off and looked around the small space of the elevator.

An old man, bent over, stood in one corner. A young woman smiled cheerfully at her. An older woman with grey hair gave her a quick nod and continued talking on the phone.

The young man, Lewis, who held the door for her, chuckled.

“Don’t worry. I’m a nurse, and I can tell that’s not a bad break.”

Lauren sighed, “That’s a relief to hear. I would hate for someone I’m babysitting to get badly injured, because I love kids and it really breaks my heart when they get hurt. Of course, it breaks my heart when anyone gets hurt but . . . oh sorry. I talk a lot, I know . . .”

“We can tell,” Richard, the old man interrupted. “But now you can stop.”

The elevator was filled with an awkward silence.

“So, are you all headed for the ground floor?” Gabriella Santos, the young woman asked. They all voiced their agreement, and the elevator began heading down.

The elevator dinged, signaling what usually would have been the opening of the doors. But the doors didn’t open.

“Huh, that’s weird,” commented Gabriella. “Why aren’t they opening?” She pressed the button, but to no avail. The doors remained closed.

“Can we open the doors already?” Amy Pope asked, having ended her phone call. She wore an impatient expression.

“That’s what we’re trying to do, but they don’t seem to be working,” Lewis said.

Richard muttered under his breath, “New-fangled technology these days. You can never trust these things to work properly. Should’ve taken the stairs.”

“Why can’t we go out?” Oliver asked.

“I don’t know, Ollie. We’re trying to figure it out. But don’t worry – we’ll be fine,” Lauren reassured him.

“Easy for you to say,” retorted Amy, “when you don’t have an extremely important job interview to get to.”

“Maybe not. But I do have a seven-year-old charge who is barely holding it together after breaking his arm. And a university course to pay for, rent to stay on top of, with not nearly enough time or money to do it all,” Lauren responded angrily.

“Let’s all remain calm, guys. I understand this is not an ideal situation for any of us to be in. But it won’t help if we take it out on each other. We can figure this out, but only if we stay calm,” Lewis said. “Now if you could all be quiet, I’m going to call the lobby and see what’s going on.”

A few moments passed, and Lewis got off the phone with the woman at the front desk.

“Okay, so what seems to have happened is the door got jammed and won’t open. It could be a computer malfunction – that’s what they’re trying to figure out right now. They don’t want to have to open it by force, but they might have to if necessary. In the meantime, we just have to stay here,” Lewis informed them.

“Well obvi –” Richard was cut off by a sharp glance from Amy.

“What I was going to say was, well obviously, we’ll make the most of our time together,” he ended the sentence with an attempt at a friendly smile.

Despite what he said, the conversation was stilted and awkward. After a bit of small talk, the conversation died, and silence descended upon the small group.

“Alright, I’ve had enough of this,” Gabriella announced. “We’re going to go around the elevator and each tell each other three things about ourselves. I just did this in my kindergarten class, and the kids did it without any problem. So, I don’t see why you can’t do it either. Who wants to start?”

Her fierce look made everyone too afraid to refuse.

“I can,” Oliver offered shyly, looking at his babysitter as if for permission. She nodded encouragingly at him.

“I-I’m Oliver Jesse Davis, but you can call me Ollie. The first thing is, I am seven and a quarter of a year old. My favourite colour is orange, and now I have a second wiggly tooth. That’s it,” he glared, as if daring someone to make a comment that would lead to dire consequences.

“Thanks Ollie,” said Gabriella, “Alright, who’s going next? Remember the kindergarteners . . .”

“I’ll go,” Richard said gruffly, “My name’s Richard Koch. First thing, I used to be a teacher, like you. I have a cat named Tigger. And my wife Shirley died ten years ago to the day, so if I don’t want to talk, pardon me.” He blinked back tears, and everyone politely pretended not to notice.

They continued around the elevator, each sharing three things about themselves. After that, it was easier for them to talk with one another. Something seemed to have clicked, and they found themselves telling each other things they never would have dreamed of

telling. Twenty minutes passed, then thirty, then forty. Yet they never ran out of things to say.

Precisely fifty-seven minutes after the doors originally shut, they opened. But the six all seemed reluctant to leave.

Perhaps it was because they had more they wanted to talk about together. Perhaps they were worried they wouldn't ever see each other again. Or perhaps, they just weren't ready to say goodbye. But they each went their separate ways, and carried on with their normal lives, day by day.

Two weeks after the incident in the elevator, Amy couldn't stop thinking about what Lauren had told her. Lauren's mother had run away from home at a young age, and her parents never heard from her again. When Lauren was born, her parents abandoned her. That was all she knew about them. She had been in foster care until she turned eighteen.

But something was nagging at Amy. Lauren's mother was named Nicola. Amy had a daughter who was also named Nicola. And her daughter had run away from home at a young age, just like Lauren's mother. It was too big of a coincidence to go unnoticed. *I'll have to look into it*, thought Amy.

Richard was sitting on his couch, when he heard a gentle knock on the door. *Hmm*, he wondered, *who could that be?* He stood up, softly groaning as his joints creaked. Richard slowly shuffled to the door and pulled it open. There stood Oliver Davis, his arm in an orange cast. In his other hand, he held a piece of paper.

"Um, hi Mr. Koch," he said shyly.

"Oh no Ollie, you can call me Richard. Come in, come in. Is it just you?" he said brusquely.

"Yeah," replied Ollie, surprised by his friendliness. *Was this really the surly man from the elevator?* He followed the old man into the apartment and stood in the kitchen as Richard bustled around, getting drinks.

"So, how's your wrist? I see you have an orange cast. That *is* your favourite colour, isn't it?" he asked, pouring juice into two glasses.

"You remembered!" Ollie beamed. "And my wrist is okay. Two more weeks with the cast, then a splint. But I can't do any sports for ages!" he trailed off, then remembered the reason he came.

"I made you this picture," he said, handing a painting to Richard.

"Why Ollie," Richard began, but found himself unable to finish. His throat tightened and tears came to his eyes. The gift was a painting of two people, an old man and a young boy. They were standing next to each other with big smiles on their faces. *Friends*, it said across the top of the page.

"I . . . I don't know what to say. This is beautiful, Ollie. Thank you so much," he said, his voice rough with emotion.

"It's just a painting . . ." Ollie replied sheepishly.

"Thanks again, Ollie," Richard said. He wrapped his arms around the small child and whispered, "Thank you."

Lauren was flicking through her mail, trying not to notice the red overdue stamps on the bills. So much to catch up on, so many payments she still needed to make. She shook her head, about to throw the pile down. But then she came across an unlabeled envelope. Puzzled, she cautiously opened it and found a check for \$1000. Attached was a note reading,

Just a little something to help cover any payments, Amy Pope.

Lauren grabbed a chair and sat down, stunned. This amount of money would cover all the payments she was behind on and there would be plenty extra.

But why? Why would Amy do this?

Thoughts ran through her head, and she found tears streaming down her cheeks. Being abandoned as a child, she never felt any real support from those around her. And now, this woman showed her the love that her parents never had.

Gabriella's phone buzzed, and she picked it up. There was a text from Lewis White:

Hey, want to go out for coffee tomorrow?

She beamed and replied almost instantly:

I'd love to. Where should we go?

Maybe this would be the start of something new.

A few weeks later, Amy opened the envelope she had been waiting for. In it she read, *Dear Amy Pope, after some searching, we have found what you have been looking for. Lauren Michelle Jones is indeed your granddaughter. Attached are the documents which will prove this. All the best, Leroy Blevins.*

She grabbed her phone and called Lauren.

"Hello? It's Amy. There's something you should know . . ."

One year later

Lewis looked at Gabriella sitting at the table across from him. Her coal black hair was pulled into a high bun, with a few strands framing her face. Her caramel coloured skin glowed in the ambient light. Her dark brown eyes met his. This was their one-year anniversary of dating, and they couldn't be happier together.

As he sat there, Lewis realised that he had been missing something in his life.

Something he had only after those elevator doors refused to open. Gabriella.

Richard's gaze fell upon the framed painting a seven-year-old boy had made for him. A painting that had brought so much joy and happiness to his life. A seven-year-old boy whom he loved like his own grandson. His life never was the same after his wife died. But it changed when those elevator doors refused to open.

Lauren took a deep breath and placed her hand on the doorknob. She was heading out to dinner with her grandmother. Her grandmother, who she didn't even know existed until one year earlier. Throughout her life, she never felt like she belonged anywhere; that she was a burden to those around her. But after meeting her grandmother that day in the elevator, her life changed in a drastic way when those elevator doors refused to open. She found somewhere she belonged.

After the incident in the elevator, all six people had gone on with their lives. Yet something was missing. Something didn't seem right anymore. They all felt a sort of emptiness, something they had never felt before. It was only when they reunited that they realised what it was they were missing.

Each other.

Six total strangers, who had never met before. Six people from different backgrounds, different nationalities. Six people who walked into the elevator that morning, not knowing how it would change their lives. Six people who impacted each other in a way that none of them would ever really understand. Six people who, by finding each other, found themselves.