

Robert Cotten paused in the stairwell and stilled his body, listening like only he could. He picked up the low murmur of conversation and wondered who else would have waited to evacuate the building. Leaving the stairwell and following the direction of the voices he only had to turn a corner before stopping at the closed doors of the elevators. The sound was coming from inside and maybe halfway up from the floor.

Raising his upper right hand Robert rapped on the burnished metal surface of the door.

"Hey, in here."

"Help we're in here."

The shouts came from inside followed by scuffling. Those trapped inside were no doubt getting to their feet. The extra noise was enough for Robert to 'see' inside the cab. The floor of the cab was about two feet above the floor. One of the people trapping inside started pounding on the inner door giving him even more sonic information. There were only two people trapped inside the cab. His new ability to also 'see' sonically allowed him to almost interpret their outlines.

Planting all four of his paws on the doors he pulled the doors apart. With his new paws and the special nature of their gripping surfaces it was easy to get the doors to start moving apart. He'd been given a bit a training on the elevator but everything he'd been told depended on there being electrical power to the building. Anything beyond a simple malfunction he was to have called the fire department. There were special tools required that the building facilities manager declined to have on hand. The doors moved four inches then stopped and gave a great deal more resistance.

Knowing it was at this point that he would damage the mechanism of the door he slipped his tentacles into the gap and pried harder. With a snap on the left side and grinding sound on the right the doors slowly slid open. His shoulders and tentacles felt the resistance mount with every inch the doors opened. At three feet of open space he was satisfied and relaxed but kept his tentacles in the gap until he could shift a pair of his hands to the sides of the doors.

Now able to see inside Robert saw that a man and a woman had been trapped. The man had been digging in his pocket and as Robert watched he brought out a lighter. The woman had been looking at the sound of the doors being forced and stared right at Robert. Meeting her eyes Robert remembered seeing a faint glow from his eyes in the mirror.

The woman said "What are you?" just as the man brought his hand up and flicked on his lighter.

There was a moment of shocked silence before they both shrieked and moved to the back of the elevator cab.

"Stop. I'm not going to hurt you." He explained.

They both continued shouting for him to go away and please don't hurt them. Shaking his head he looked at the doors and brought his hands away from the door edges an inch or two. Seeing that the doors were stuck in their position he stepped away. The two were still hysterical and pushing back against the back wall of the elevator. The male had let the light go out but they both still watched his eyes through every move he made.

He stood in front of the elevator and after a moment's reflection closed a nictitating membrane over his eyes. From their reactions he knew what his instincts had told him was true. They could no longer see the glow from his eyes but his night vision remained unaffected. A perfect adaptation for hunting.

They both quieted and became just a bit calmer at the absence of glowing eyes before them. Still up against the back of the car the man lifted his lighter again. This time they didn't panic but still stared as if Robert was eyeing them as dinner.

"Assholes. It's not my fault I look like this now."

The man kept his arm with the lighter held up and replied "Stay the fuck away from us."

Opening his nitrating membrane Robert answered "Fine, but mind the gap under the elevator. There's enough room there to slip in and fall."

He backed away from the elevator and turned the corner back toward the stairs. He could hear-see them slowly stepping closer to the door. Slipping through the propped open fire door Robert dropped to all six paws and made his way up. It actually felt good to slink soundlessly like a cat. The multiple sensory organs on his tentacles informed him the entire stairwell was empty for the moment. His eyes saw just fine and were augmented by the sensory functions of his tentacles and facial tendrils. He was beginning to like his new form despite the reactions he'd just endured.

Three flights up Robert stopped and settled down on the floor with his head and tentacles positioned over the edge to watch. Minutes went by before he saw the dim light of the tiny flame created by the man's lighter. He led the way into the stairwell slowly waving the lighter before him no doubt searching for signs of Robert or any other strange beast of the dark. The woman appeared behind him holding his free hand. Somewhat assured at not seeing Robert in the darkness three floors above them they cautiously made their way down the stairs. As soon as the man put his hand on the rail he let the light go out. Robert guessed the lighter was growing a bit warm in his hand.

We watched as the male lead the way as the pair stared down. Laying on the cool landing of the fifteenth floor he watched as they made their way to the ground and out of the stairs. He smirked after they closed the door behind themselves. His smirk changed to a frown when the breeze that had been flowing up the shaft died. Lifting himself to his feet he started down.

Choosing to go on all six he felt the grace inherent in the body he now wore. He'd never felt this physically capable, agile and strong. As an experiment he tried crawling along the walls. It turned out to be easy. The evermore impressive gripping nature of his hand and foot pads made the task just one of holding his weight in a different manner. Reaching the fifth floor he dared trying moving down with just the pads of his tentacles. The lengthy reach of the meaty fibrous tentacles made moving down the spacious stairwell just as easy. Even better the use of them to grasp the rails and sides of the stairwell in no way diminished the ability of the sensory function allowing him to sense every inch of the area of the stairwell he passed through.

Thrilled at the unmistakable display of the strength his tentacles possessed he reached the ground floor and started back up as a test. As he climbed the shaft using just his tentacles Robert challenged himself by keeping his body at the center of the well. He reached the top in no time and started back down using the same method. Stopping at the third floor he settled his feet back on the floor and passed through the door leading into the topmost level of the lobby.

Light spilled into the lobby from the windowed front wall. He made his way to the balcony overlooking the entire lobby. The two humans he'd freed from the elevator were nowhere in sight. There was no movement below him with the exception of shadows that crossed the floor of the lobby. There were clearly people crossing in front of the building out on the street. Robert looked up at the massive hanging chandelier that filled the space above the lobby floor. Made of panes of thick glass they usually threw squares of refracted light everywhere.

He could see himself in several of the hanging panes of glass. He'd always get the same reaction at the sight of his new nature now. He had to admit, for now he would have to be a creature of the darkness, stealth was now his greatest ally. His instincts were also telling him there was much more to learn about himself. After one last look at the empty lobby below his vantage he stepped back into the dark stairwell.