

ELEVATOR

By Gail Parrish

AN EXERPT

(Bruce, a maintenance man, and Charles, lawyer, are frustrated as they try to escape the stalled elevator that has them trapped. Bruce is black, Charles is white.)

BRUCE
You ever been to the projects?

CHARLES
No.

BRUCE
Never?

CHARLES
Oh, maybe once.

BRUCE
Not twice? Three times maybe?

CHARLES
Maybe. So what?

BRUCE
Yeah? Where?

CHARLES
Oh, what was it. . .? Darwell Homes!

BRUCE
What'd you go for?

CHARLES
Damn, I don't remember. What are you getting at?

BRUCE

Just give me a minute. So why were you there, at Darwell Homes?

CHARLES

Oh, it was a long time ago. I was at the law clinic. We were working with a group of people that. . .

(Charles slows his speech as he recognizes Bruce)

. . .that wanted . . . to . . .sue. . .

(Charles sits up straight. Bruce smiles widely)

about the conditions of the elevators! That's you! That was your group!! You were in that group that wanted to sue the housing authority! I knew I knew you from somewhere!

BRUCE

Well, well, well. Small world, ain't it?

CHARLES

Certainly is! Well, so. . . this is really a coincidence, huh?

BRUCE

Yeah, I'd say so.

CHARLES

That was a long time ago. Had to be about twelve. . .

BRUCE

(Quickly)

Fifteen.

CHARLES

Huh?

BRUCE

It was fifteen years ago, the last time I saw you.

CHARLES

You got a good memory.

BRUCE

When its something important.

CHARLES

So, uh, whatever happened with that situation out there with the elevators?

BRUCE

Situation? What you talking about? What situation?

CHARLES

(Laughing a little. Uncomfortable)

You know. With the elevators in the building. They were breaking down all the time and your group wanted to sue. . .

BRUCE

(Cutting him off abruptly)

EXCUSE ME! We didn't want to sue. That was you and that buddy of yours, what was his name. . .?

(Snaps fingers, trying to recall)

CHARLES

David. David Shay.

BRUCE

David! How in the world could I forget David Shay? Anyway, you remember that was you and David that wanted us to sue. We just wanted those bad boys fixed, that's all we wanted. But you and David said, "Sue! That's the only way to get those downtown boys to listen. Sue 'em." But a lot of people in the group didn't want to do that. They said it would take too long, and they was afraid somebody, some kid or something would get hurt on the elevators in the meantime. You remember that? But you and David said you'd file a suit on behalf of the residents of Darwell Homes and, then, since that was gonna take awhile, IN THE MEANTIME, you and David would help us with other ways of dealing with the elevator problem and the kids playing on 'em and all. That sound familiar to you?

CHARLES

Okay, yeah, and we filed the suit on behalf. . .

BRUCE

You filed the suit?

CHARLES

We prepared to file the suit, but we. . .

BRUCE

AW!!

(Fake sympathy)

Ain't that a shame. Never did file it. What happened?

CHARLES

The new semester started. We left the clinic. I was in a different module that didn't require fieldwork.

BRUCE

Oh, so you were doing fieldwork when you came out to Darwell. We was just helping you fulfill your school requirements.

CHARLES

Somebody in your group asked us to come out. It just so happened we were able to use the work we did out there to fulfill the fieldwork requirement.

BRUCE

I see. And when the school bell rings, DING!, class is over and it's time for the schoolboys to go to another class. Simple as that, am I right?

CHARLES

You're wrong. It wasn't like that at all. David and I wanted to come out there.

BRUCE

Oh, I'm sure you did. Made you feel downright righteous, didn't it, helping us poor needy folks like that? Besides, that was the thing to do back then, wasn't it? Just like Afros and love beads. Helping poor folks was the height of fashion.

(Bruce fingers Charles lapel)

My, how times have changed. Right, Mr. Money-bags? Mr. Corporate law?

CHARLES

Listen, I don't have to defend anything to you.

BRUCE

No, you don't. You truly don't.

CHARLES

We came out to you people in good faith, trying to help. We found you totally disorganized, without any direction. The first thing we tried to do was put some order in the situation. You people didn't have the faintest idea of what you wanted!

BRUCE

Oh, we did. We knew we wanted those elevators fixed.

CHARLES

But you didn't have the foggiest notion about the best way to do that.

BRUCE

I THOUGHT that was why we asked YOU to come out.

CHARLES

And we gave you our advice.

BRUCE

Gave us a little more than that. Why'd you call the newspapers? Nobody asked for that.

CHARLES

We THOUGHT it would help.

BRUCE

Help who? Didn't help us. How'd it do you? You get paid for that article you wrote about the "Forgotten People of Darwell Homes"? Ha! Only you was the main one doing the forgetting, right?

CHARLES

(Hurriedly pulling out his checkbook)

Listen, I don't have time to argue with you about something that happened twelve. . .

BRUCE

Fifteen. . .

CHARLES

What?

BRUCE

Fifteen years. It was fifteen years ago it happened.

CHARLES

(Writing in checkbook)

Whatever. Anyway, I'd love to stand up here and feel appropriately guilty for all my past sins as imagined by you, but unfortunately I'm late for a very important appointment, so if you'd just tell me how much this little elevator ride is going to set me back, I'll write it out, sign my name and be on my way.

BRUCE

Man, I don't believe you.

