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## WHITE ELEVATORS

“Which floor?”

You stare at me confused as if you’d somehow managed to sleep walk here and can’t fathom how you’ve made it all the way to work. It’s 8:24am, which means you’ve made it here early before the late bloomers rush in all practicing the excuses they’d tell their bosses.

*Did you come up I-95? Unbelievable.* I press seven as my destination and my index finger lingers over the connect four board of elevator buttons from one to nine waiting for you to answer. A smirk strains the muscles in your face overbore with lethargy. One cup of your daily pumpkin spice latte and you’d have proudly flexed a grimace or sneer.

But it’s Thursday. The enthusiasm of the week has worn off and no amount of caffeine will rid you of “Why the fuck isn’t it Friday already?”. My hand retreats to my pocket and I stare ahead at “MAX CAPACITY 3,500LBS” and listen to the silence between us bounce against the walls. The tension alone is heavy enough to cause the car to collapse down the shaft. I reach my floor and as my foot hovers above the tiny gap where the door slid open I see you reach to press a button for a floor we’d already passed. I tell

myself that it had nothing to do with me, maybe you weren't sure where to go and had to think or maybe you simply forgot.

Again, here we are. By we I mean myself and you, white women who cannot bear such proximity to my blackness. Different body, same disdain for my audacity to ride in the same space as you. Did I miss the "WHITES ONLY" sign? You move to the corner furthest from me and reek of nigger-less nostalgia. I see you staring from the bottom left corner of your orbital sockets in the same manner that if you were speaking would indicate you were telling a lie.

And you were. The lies you tell yourself about black people. Telling yourself all the things that would happen to you if you got too close. If you'd bump into me my pigment might rub off onto you, leave a permanent stain and you'd now fail the one drop rule. I can see into your purse through its calf skin with complete clarity, pick out what I wanted ahead of time and rob you before we even reached the third floor. I'm only here at this university due to affirmative action, at any moment I'd recognize your privilege and request a hand out from you. Lies. I step off a floor early and you slide into the uninvasion breathing room.

Look me up and down. Head to toe. Toe to dread locked head. How can I be so beautiful and not even comb my hair? My presence is effortless. White gentleman sniffs around and turns to say "It smells tropical in here" and your eyes harden. You know it's me. Coconut oil clogs your nostrils so you'd been holding your breath. Your stare transfixes and I miss my floor. You'll have to break your gaze to get off and lose the no blinking contest you've made with all the other moonlit skinned women present. You look away reluctantly cause my skin absorbs both sight and sunlight.

It's just us, alone. You'd scream "RAPE!" if I were a man. Start a riot. Burn my town to the ground so there'd be no blacks that close to you ever again. Claim the elevator tune I was whistling was a menacing cat call. But I am a black woman, the greater of sexual plunder. I'd like to scream, but instead: "Have a nice day."

I try to make you more comfortable. Smiles as warm as my perpetual tan. Greetings that would have you think I were the elevator operator. Hold the door for you to run to until you see me and just wave to let it close, you'll catch the next one. Stare at the ceiling or at the corner to allow you to view my existence here without our eyes locking. And although its fourteen flights 'til I reach my desk, tomorrow I start taking the stairs.