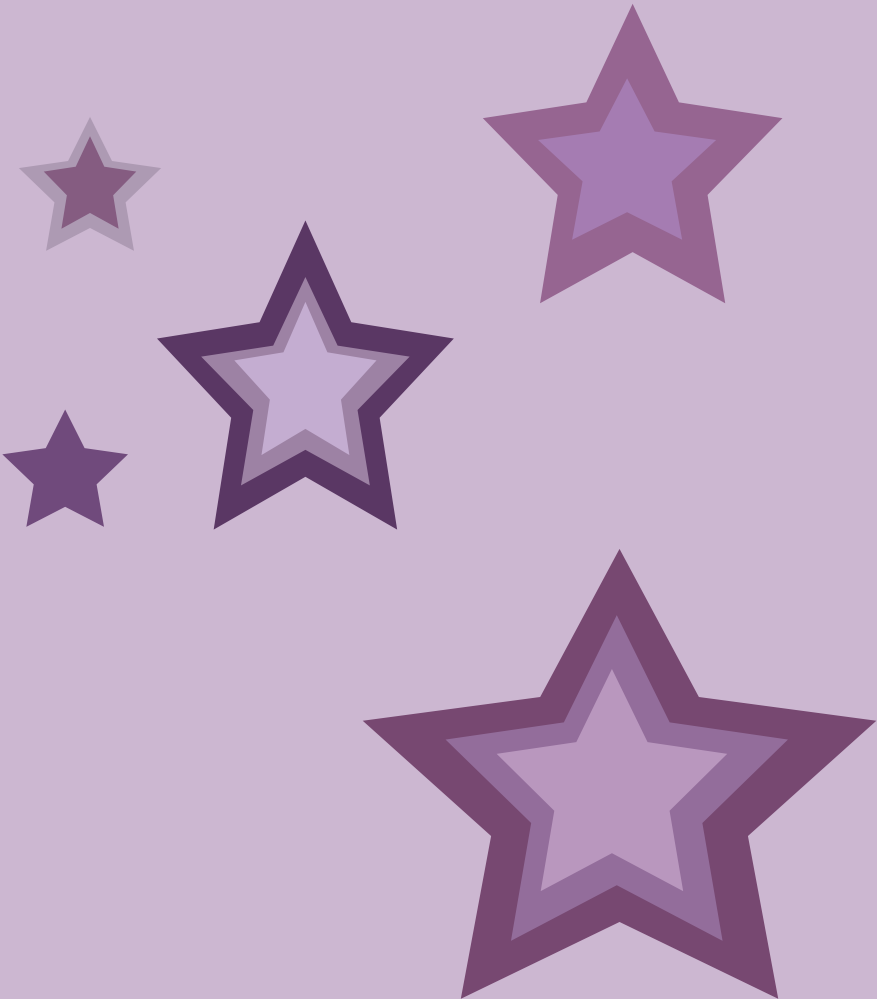


Saana Lahtinen

ELEVATOR INCIDENT OF 2016



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To the most precious being in this universe, Dara.

ENTERTAINMENT!!

I wanted to stay awake longer. The day had been horrible, like pushing a rock up a never-ending hill, and a craving for something nice was overwhelming. A small thing, like a funny joke that would at least make me smile or laugh, *weakly*. However, that tiny thing felt impossible to ask for. It was January, early January, which is not as bad as *late* January. The excitement of the new year was still in the air, but soon enough it would be overshadowed by the bleakness of winter. It was snowing heavily, and I sat on the couch with my dog. She was a schipperke with more fur than a so-called normal one. Her fur was dark and in the middle of the night, she blended into the shadows with her small body. Only her eyes glowed, revealing the dog's position.

The TV was on; I was hoping that in between the advertisements for mostly useless things something funny would appear and make me laugh. No, it felt like laughter was too much to ask from the universe, a simple smile would be enough for me to call it a night. Soon, a possible distraction from reality appeared on the screen. A pig wearing a suit, sitting like a human, and smiling oddly caught my attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome!" The pig said with a strong scratchy voice. It sounded as if the animal was a chain smoker. *"Today we have a guest! The one and only Mr. Brown!"*

Clapping and cheering erupted as the cameras turned to face the audience full of animals: giraffes, armadillos, elephants, flamingos, dogs, cats, peacocks, etc. Then, Mr. Brown, a brown bear, walked to the stage, waving his paw, and greeting the suit-wearing pig. My dog noticed the absurdity of the show and focused on the screen. Her ears were pointed up and her eyes followed the animals' movements.

"Great to have you here, Mr. Brown. Looks like you're the fan-favorite!"

"Wow, that's wonderful to hear. Thank you so much for having me as a guest. This is a dream come true for me." The bear said, breathy.

"Lovely!" The pig smiled. *"Well, I need to ask the question."*

"Go ahead, I think the audience is dying to know."

"How do you manage this newfound fame? You jumped from being an unknown actor to the most known actor almost overnight! Your performance has gained many nominations for awards." The pig spoke fast and loudly, alternating between speaking to Mr. Brown and the audience.

"It's a lot, I'll admit it, but it's so worth it. Never would I've dreamed of this; auditioning for fun changed my life. I didn't have any prior experience and didn't think I had any chance, but here I am! It feels wonderful and I just want to thank everyone."

"Oh, that's right! Your first role is your breakthrough role, congratulations!"

"Thank you, I got really lucky." Mr. Brown replied.

"Do you have anything to say to aspiring actors?"

The pig motioned for the camera to zoom in on the bear's face.

"Don't limit yourself by focusing too much on the outcome. You'll lose opportunities and enjoyment if you don't let things flow."

I stared at the screen, bewildered that Mr. Brown's words struck something in my heart. The show seemed like a fever dream, and I shook my head to wake myself up to find out that I wasn't asleep. I reached for the remote, but my dog's paw landed on it before my hand did. I stared at the dog, amused. My smile dropped as she bared her teeth. The dog's brown eyes held such intensity that the message was clear; let her watch the show.

CATCHING ALLURE

From the moment the airplane took off to its landing, there had been continuous arguing between Juno and Santiago. Not even the warmth of the Spanish sun could calm the two down, especially Juno. The group stood in silence, listening to them bickering about which way was fastest to the small village where they'd spend an entire week, celebrating graduating from university. Santiago, who was from Spain, knew the best route because he had visited the village before. Juno, an American woman, who had never been to Spain, insisted she knew better. Penelope, Aloisio, and Helene stared at the two arguing, refusing to step in. Anyone who had conversed with Juno knew how she was; her way or nothing. Discussing anything with that woman was an exhausting battle you couldn't win.

"Can we just go get the car?" Aloisio interrupted the two, tired of their endless fighting. He was beginning to regret accepting the invite from Helene to join the trip. He could've stayed in London and spent this time with his closest friends instead of listening to Juno and Santiago, of all people. "You two have plenty of time to disagree in the car."

"I'm driving," Santiago hissed. "And *I'm* the one who decides the route." He stomped off to the rental office inside the airport. Juno started ranting, saying she knew better. She could read a map, *unlike Santiago*. Helene tried to argue with her, saying that he had been there before, but her

A strange late-night talk show lifts spirits with absurdity until it doesn't.

What is causing distress in the small village, could a children's story be true?

Money. That's it. Really, it can make people do awful things.

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