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CLASS: X

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LITERATURE

THE ELEVATOR

BY: WILLIAM SLEATOR

SYNOPSIS:

Martin, a weak thin twelve-year old boy is the protagonist of this short story. Martin dreaded using elevators as he feared that they would fall. He had shifted with his father to an apartment on the seventeenth (17) floor of an old building having an elevator which was particularly scary. This was because of its poor lighting, dirty walls and a defective door that never stayed open for long and slammed shut with a loud noise. It was also too small and could carry only three people. Martin could not use the stairs because they were equally bad and scary with neither any windows nor any working lights.

Once after school, when he tried taking the stairs he reached home gasping for breath. His father scolded him for not using the elevator. Martin felt as if he was chiding him: saying he was not only weak and skinny, bad at sports but also a coward. Martin felt that if he forced himself to use the elevator he would get used to it as was the case of bullying at school. But he never got used to the elevator.

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One morning, when the elevator stopped at the fourteenth floor (14th), a fat lady got in. It was the result of his intense fear that gave birth to a living nightmare in the form of an imaginary, large lady, whom he always met in the elevator at different floors.

In fact, for Martin she became a bigger fear than the elevator and that helps in the forward movement of the story and leaves the end of the story in a cliffhanger for the readers to decide for themselves.

This imaginary lady had large fleshy cheeks and no chin. She was so fat that Martin had to squeeze himself into a corner. She did nothing but stared at Martin, who was forced to wait for her to get off the elevator. He then ran practically all the way to school.

Martin was quite nervous when he returned to the building after school. He felt ashamed of himself at the thought of getting scared of an old lady. He entered the elevator, hoping that it would not stop, but it stopped on the third (3rd) floor. Martin watched the door slide open and to his horror he saw the same lady staring at him as if she knew he would be there.

Martin weakly said 'Going up!' in the hope that she would be going down and would not enter the elevator. But she nodded and stepped in.

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The door slammed. This time she did not press fourteen (14th), but eighteen (18), the top floor.

Martin was perplexed that in the morning she got on the elevator at the fourteenth floor (14), so why did she get on at the third (3rd) floor then and go up to eighteenth floor. Martin wanted to press seven so that he could get out and walk up the stairs, but he could not reach the buttons without touching her, and did not want to do that.

When the elevator stopped, she hardly moved out of his way. He squeezed past her, rubbing against her scratchy coat. He was scared that the door would close before he could do that so he wanted to share this experience with someone. So he told his father that she was in the elevator with him twice and she just kept staring at him. His father scolded him for being afraid of some poor old lady.

In anger, Martin's father exclaimed that he feared Martin would remain timid all his life. This hurt Martin terribly and he cried in the privacy of his room. His father probably was aware of the effect of his harsh words on his son. He slept very little. In the morning, when he saw the lady in the elevator he started running down the stairs. The stairs being

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dark, he fell down and broke his leg. His father was silent on the way to the hospital, disappointed and angry with him for being a coward and a fool. Martin had broken his leg and needed to walk on crutches. He knew that he won't be able to use the stairs.

After coming back from the hospital his father accompanied him in the elevator. Martin felt relieved that there was no ... room for the lady to get in, and if she did, his father would see her and may be then, he would understand him. His father got off at the ninth (9th) floor to visit Mrs. Ullman, leaving Martin alone in the elevator. Martin pleaded with his father to take him along but he did not.

Martin tried to press nine to accompany his father, but the elevator did not stop. It stopped at the tenth floor (10th), where the fat lady was waiting. Quickly she moved in. Martin, in crutches, was too slow to get past her in time to get out. The door shut and the elevator began to move. The fat lady greeted him by his name. She laughed, and pushed the stop button.

So we can say that the story ends in cliffhanger with Martin trapped with the same lady in the elevator.

Home work

Read the story thoroughly and practice last two extracts of 'The Elevator'.

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