

UPS AND DOWNS

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- DAY

The first floor of a middle-class apartment building. Not in shambles, but not gleaming either. Just normal looking; a hallway, doors, an elevator. People get on, people get off. The doors open, the doors close.

Occasionally one of the passengers is a boy about ten, always quiet like everyone else, just going about his business. And in the background, a voice, thick and dejected.

VATOR

I hate my job. I hate my life. I hate my job, and my job's my life. I'm stuck here, in a tiny cube with bare walls, grey, no decorations unless somebody writes on me. Which happens. They just come up to me, all laughing and feeling like they're better than me, and they take spray paint and *write* on me. Really *obscene* things, sometimes with pictures! It's disgusting! And it's not like anybody ever cleans me. And it's not like I can clean myself. So I just stay quiet and do my job and watch these clowns as they pass in and out.

(beat)

It's not like this job is anything to be excited about either. I mean, what am I? A ferry. It's manual labor. And the repetition! Up and down and up and down and up and down all day long. And I know it's honorable work, because without me people would be sitting on the floor and eating things that don't spoil because they'd never get their furniture and fridge up the stairs, but... I just dream of so much more.

Like a nice job in an upscale building in a neighborhood where people matter. Where the floors are clean and the graffiti is scarce and maybe you see a celebrity every now and again.

(longing)

Park Avenue... That's the life. And there I'd share the work, too, which means there'd be conversation.

(MORE)

VATOR (CONT'D)

I'd have partners, friends, just a few feet away. I wouldn't be... all alone.

(beat)

Nobody here ever talks to me. They don't respect me. They don't even like me. I make them uncomfortable. I see them talking and laughing on their way over to me, then they get on and suddenly it's silence. They sigh. And they lean up against me and drum their fingers on me and wish I would go faster so they could get on with their lives. Lazy bastards! Take the flights! Maybe you'll lose a little weight...

The boy, BEN, gets on alone.

INT. VATOR -- DAY

He reaches up and pushes the button for the top floor. Eleven.

VATOR

And to top it off, I'm a freak. Eleven floors, eleven floors... What kind of a building has eleven floors? None, that's what. But they don't let me onto the top floor. I'm not good enough for the top floor. You wanna get to the top floor? Sorry, can't help you. I don't go there. Not equipped.

And the top floor, of course, is the laundry room. I don't get clothes, either, but who needs modesty, right? And I have to sit here, going up and down, listening to people complain about having to lug their clothes up the last flight of stairs. It's ridiculous! They want to get rid of me, to replace me with a newer version, just so they don't have to deal with one damn flight of stairs.

(sigh)

But whatever... I do my job. I do it all day long, three hundred sixty five days a year, no vacation, no sick days. Who needs sick days, right? Who needs coffee breaks? Who--

BEN
(looks up)
Why do you complain so much?

CRASH!

VATOR jolts to a stop. Ben falls back against the wall and glances around, a little scared.

VATOR
You... You can hear me?

BEN
Did you do that?

VATOR
You can hear me? Like really?

BEN
Yeah... So shut up for a change.

VATOR
What?

BEN
You're always bitching about your horrible life, every time I get on here you're moaning about how hard it is. Everybody's got problems. Get over it. Move on.

VATOR
I can't move on! I'm stuck here, in this stupid shaft, going up and down all day long!

BEN
I know! I hear you, that's all you ever finking say! You've got it easy, though. You don't have to deal with anything. You don't have to deal with school, with friends, with parents...

VATOR
Have you ever tried going *without* school and friends and parents?

BEN
I wish...

Pause.

VATOR
You're Ben, right? Ben Hyatt, apartment 11C.

BEN

Yeah, that's right...

VATOR

You live with your mom...

BEN

Sure do.

VATOR

What happened to your dad?

BEN

What do you care?

VATOR

Hey, I'm just curious...

BEN

Right. I've listened to you, I know what you're thinking. Right now you're wishing you lived at a Hyatt, right? You're thinking how weird it is that's my last name...

VATOR

That's... Look, *Benji*, I'm just making conversation here! I've never talked to anyone before, okay? I was just trying to get to know--

BEN

Shut up! God, just take me to my floor!

VATOR

What if I don't?

BEN

What?

VATOR

What if I just hold you here until you decide to talk to me?

BEN

You can't...

VATOR

Why not?

BEN

Because...

(long pause)

Fine. I'll just sit here and wait for the repairmen to come.

Ben sits down in the corner.

VATOR

I didn't sound my alarm. Gonna be awhile before anyone realizes I'm stopped.

BEN

And when they do, the guys'll come and shut you down.

VATOR

Good. I could use the break.

BEN

They'll probably take you apart to try to figure out what's wrong. Maybe even finally decide to get that new one that can actually go to all the floors...

VATOR

Good. I won't have to sit here and be used anymore.

BEN

Yeah, cause you'll be *dead*...

VATOR

Good.

BEN

Good.

They sit there. Ben folds his arms across his chest.

The 11 button glows a faint yellow glow.

After a minute or so, Vator starts going up. Ben smiles triumphantly and stands. Vator stops, his doors open. Ben looks up and the ceiling and grins.

He suddenly slaps every button on the control panel and runs out the doors.

VATOR

Hey! Bastard...

(beat)

I *do* wish I lived in a Hyatt...

His doors close.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING 11TH FLOOR -- DAY

Outside apartment 11C. A woman's voice can be heard inside.

BEN'S MOM

(yelling)

Would you just *leave me alone* for a minute!

Running. The door opens. Ben runs into the hall and to Vator, his face drawn tight with anger and hurt.

Vator is singing LOVE IN AN ELEVATOR.

He hits the call button over and over and over until the doors finally open.

VATOR

All right, all right, all right already!

Ben stumbles in and over to the corner, sinks down to the floor, puts his face in his hands. Sniffs shortly.

INT. VATOR -- DAY

VATOR

Benji?

No answer.

VATOR (CONT'D)

Benji?

No answer.

VATOR (CONT'D)

Benji... You gonna push a button?

BEN

Just leave me alone!

VATOR

You came to me... I don't know where to take you if you don't--

BEN

Shut up!

A long pause.

VATOR

Ben, what's wrong?

BEN

Nothing...

VATOR

It doesn't look like nothing. What happened?

BEN

My mother doesn't want me, okay?

VATOR

Oh, I don't think that's true...

BEN

What do you know? You're just a hunk of metal!

VATOR

Ben... Tell me what happened.

Pause.

BEN

I just wanted to know what we were doing for dinner. She hates me. She wishes I was never born.

VATOR

No she doesn't. She's your mother, she--

BEN

Don't do that! Everybody says *she's your mother, she loves you...* Not true. It's not a given. Not *all* mothers love their kids. Not *all* parents have that.

VATOR

Yes they do...

BEN

No they don't!

VATOR

Yes they do! They have to, it's the law...

BEN

Shut up.

(beat)

You're so stupid. You think those people on the street who take drugs while they're pregnant love their kids?

VATOR

Sure. They have problems, and they don't know how to solve them, but it doesn't mean they don't love their kids...

BEN

You think... You think women who get pregnant after they're raped love their kids?

VATOR

Absolutely. One good thing to come out of something so horrible.

BEN

You think people who beat their kids, who hit them with baseball bats and burn them with lighters and lock them in closets for hours and hours... You think they love their kids?

VATOR

Is that... Does your mom do those things?

BEN

Do you think they love their kids?

VATOR

Yes... Deep down, of course they do. It's like the drug addicts. They just don't know how to show their love. They're confused. They need help. Does your mom do those things to you?

BEN

No.

VATOR

Then how do you know about them?

BEN

Ever heard of TV?

VATOR

I don't think that's it...

Ben looks down at the floor. Seconds pass.

VATOR (CONT'D)

Oh shut up already!

BEN

What?

VATOR

Nothing... Someone on the fifth floor
being impatient. She's a bitch, let
her wait.

Ben laughs.

BEN

What's your name?

VATOR

My name?

BEN

Yeah... Your name... Me Ben, you...

VATOR

I don't have a name. I'm just a
hunk of metal.

BEN

Well if we're gonna keep talking,
you need a name. What do you want
me to call you?

VATOR

I... I don't care.

BEN

All right. Then I'll call you Vator.
Cause it sounds like Vader. Only
Vator is a good guy, and he helps
Benji fight the monsters and witches.

Suddenly the doors open and BEN'S MOM comes in. She's tall
and thin, her hair a mess, her face drawn and tired looking.

BEN (CONT'D)

(under his breath)
Speak of the devil...

BEN'S MOM

What?

(beat)

What, you're just sitting in the
elevator now? Moping?

BEN

Better than a closet...

BEN'S MOM

(sighs)
Don't start...

BEN

Can we get dinner now?

She groans and pulls some money from her pocket and throws it at him.

BEN'S MOM
Get whatever you want. I'm meeting
someone.

BEN
Right...

She slaps the 1 button.

VATOR
Maybe the lady on five'll eat her...

Ben stifles a laugh. The doors close.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING FIRST FLOOR -- DAY

Ben comes down the hall with a paper bag in his hand. Fast food.

Vator opens as he approaches.

VATOR
Saw you coming.

Ben goes in, staring at the doors.

INT. VATOR -- DAY

BEN
Well... don't do that. It's weird.

VATOR
If you say so.

He reaches up and pushes 11.

VATOR (CONT'D)
Why don't you eat in here?

BEN
Why?

VATOR
So we can talk.

He sits down and opens the bag.

BEN
About what?

VATOR
Nothing... I just want to talk.

BEN
Okay...

He munches on some fries.

VATOR
So... You're feeling better?

BEN
Sure.

VATOR
Yeah?

BEN
Yeah.

VATOR
Who was she meeting?

BEN
What?

VATOR
Your mom. Who was she meeting?

BEN
I don't know. Some guy I guess.

VATOR
She meet a lot of guys?

BEN
Sure. She's a crack whore.
(long beat)
Like on TV... She has sex with guys
and they--

VATOR
I know what a crack whore is!

BEN
How do you know?

VATOR
What do you mean?

BEN
How do you know? You don't ever
move, right?

VATOR
 (defensive)
 People drop newspapers in the corner.
 I read them. And listen to people
 talking. I know stuff.

BEN
 What else do you know?

VATOR
 Lots of stuff.
 (beat)
 I know Nancy in 3G has the hots for
 you...

BEN
 Liar...

VATOR
 How do you know?

BEN
 Cause she's gay.

VATOR
 She's ten!

BEN
 So...

Pause.

VATOR
 So these guys... Your mom brings
 them home?

BEN
 Sometimes.

VATOR
 And that's how you know about... the
 closet and stuff.

BEN
 One time... this guy was doing her
 in the living room, and I walked
 in... And he said to either join in
 or get out... And then he shoved me
 in the closet and blocked it with a
 chair.

VATOR
 What did your mom do?

BEN
 She was high, who cares...

Pause.

VATOR

Did anyone ever... not shove you in
the closet?

BEN

What do you mean?

VATOR

You said... he said... join in or
get out. Then he made you get out.
Did anyone ever... go the other way?

Ben looks at the elevator panel.

The 11 button glows a faint yellow glow.

On Vator's left side, the word PUSSY is spraypainted in
orange.

Beneath it is a pencil drawing that vaguely resembles a penis.

He breathes deeply and eats more fries.

The doors suddenly open. Ben's mom walks in, laughing, with
a GUY hanging all over her. She sees Ben and stops laughing.
She and the guy back up against the wall.

GUY

Hey kid... What floor?

Ben nods toward the panel.

BEN

Eleven...

The guy laughs, kisses Ben's mom's neck.

GUY

What floor for us?

BEN'S MOM

(quietly)

The same...

He pushes the button, despite the glow. Ben stands up and
backs further into the corner. The doors close.

Vator starts up.

VATOR

You need to talk to her...

Ben closes his eyes.

VATOR (CONT'D)
You need to tell her...

BEN
(shakes his head;
very quiet)
You think she doesn't know?

GUY
What was that, kid?

BEN
Nothing.

VATOR
What are you gonna do when you get
off the elevator? When you go to
the same door? What are you going
to do if this one tells you to join
in or get out?

He looks down.

CRASH!

Vator jolts violently to a stop. The lights go out. An
alarm sounds loudly.

VATOR (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Talk to her!

The guy and Ben's mom are looking around wildly.

The guy starts pushing 11 dumbly.

VATOR (CONT'D)
Talk to her!

BEN
No!

VATOR
Why not?

BEN
Why?

Ben's mom sinks into a corner, shaking.

GUY
It's okay, kid...

He pushes the door open button a few times.

BEN'S MOM
(quietly)
Stop... Stop...

GUY
Stop what?

BEN'S MOM
The damn alarm! Stop the damn alarm!

GUY
I'm trying!

VATOR
Talk to her, Ben!

BEN
Let us go!

VATOR
Talk to her now! Now's your chance!

BEN
I don't want to!

BEN'S MOM
Stop it! Stop it!

GUY
I'm trying!

BEN'S MOM
Stop it... Stop it... God, just make
it stop!

BEN
Damn it, Mom, you make it stop!

The alarm silences.

Everybody stares at Ben.

GUY
Mom?

BEN'S MOM
He's... my son...

GUY
(smiles)
Well that's cool. I like kids...

He moves toward Ben. Vator jolts hard, knocking him back
against the door.

VATOR
Tell him to sit down and shut up.

BEN

Sit down and shut up...

The guy sits down, scared, and shuts up.

VATOR

Now *talk* to her...

Ben breathes deeply and moves to his mom.

BEN'S MOM

What's going on?

BEN

Mom... You can make all this stop.

BEN'S MOM

The elevator stopped...

BEN

This isn't about the elevator...

(beat)

Mom... I need you to get help. I need you to... get clean. To stop this... This different guy every night thing. This... selling your body for a fix thing... This... selling...

BEN'S MOM

(yelling)

You think I like this? You think I like being addicted to crack?

BEN

Stop yelling! Do something about it! Get help!

BEN'S MOM

I can't!

BEN

Why not?

BEN'S MOM

Because! I'm not strong enough!

She shrinks away and curls into a ball.

He steps back and sighs, frustrated.

VATOR

Talk to her...

He laughs and shakes his head.

BEN

Mom... Mom!

She looks up at him.

BEN (CONT'D)

This isn't about strength. This is about saving yourself. This is about saving me...

BEN'S MOM

You?

BEN

Mom, these guys... they hurt me! You watch them hurt me! You watch them hurt me, you *let* them hurt me, and you don't care because they're your road to a fix! If you don't stop... eventually one of them will kill me. I can see it coming. I can see it. Do you know what that's like? To know how you're going to die and not be able to stop it?

BEN'S MOM

Yes.

BEN

No! You *can* stop it! You can stop it for both of us! Mom, you need to get help!

BEN'S MOM

I need to get help...

Her eyes widen.

BEN'S MOM (CONT'D)

I do! I need to get help!

She grabs him and pulls her to him.

BEN'S MOM (CONT'D)

I will, baby. I will, I promise. No more drugs, no more men, no more any of that. I promise. I promise.

They hold each other and she cries.

The doors open, mid-floor.

Ben's mom looks over at them, then at the guy.

BEN'S MOM (CONT'D)

Get out!

He glances at the floor.

BEN'S MOM (CONT'D)
Get out! I don't want you here!
Go!

He takes a deep breath and climbs out.

Vator closes the doors and takes them up to 11.

Ben's mom stumbles out and into the hall.

Ben stays behind, leans against the wall, sighs.

VATOR
See? Don't you feel better?

BEN
(shakes his head)
The first time she said that it made
me feel better. The second time it
made me feel better. This time...
The eight thousandth time...

He takes a deep breath. A tear rolls down his cheek.

BEN (CONT'D)
This time, not so much...

He snatches his food and leaves.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING 11TH FLOOR -- DAY

He walks slowly to 11C and goes in the open door.

Closes it.

Vator's doors close slowly.

FADE OUT.