

CLOSE TO YOU

John Boston

Paul Dooley was a Certified Elevator Technician. He could build, modify and repair any hydraulic lift system as specified by the National Association of Elevator Contractors. He made sixty dollars an hour plus overtime which was over a hundred dollars an hour. He paid nothing for his benefits and had a generous 401k package along with a free-use company van he could drive whenever and wherever he wanted.

The job still was not worth the money. It was very physically demanding. He was just getting too old to do it anymore. He was fifty-two. His body was well past its prime. Some of these doors weighed over a thousand pounds.

The elevator business was a young man's game, plain and simple.

Most days he was miserable and made those around him miserable. He worked so many hours, he had a cot set up in the back of his work van. His latest assignment almost killed him. Eighteen-hour days with just a lunch break and bathroom breaks. He made almost five thousand dollars in one week.

It still wasn't worth the money.

To become a CET, one had to complete a nearly five-year-long program. There was a lot to learn. You had to become knowledgeable about many things, not just the elevators themselves. Electronics, hoist cables, pneumatics, blueprint reading, fabrication. The demands of the job were constantly getting larger, but the pay did not seem to be catching up. His niece made more money than he did by posting videos of herself working out online. She had more sense about her than he did at her age.

He was constantly getting apprentices assigned to him by the union. Some were fairly knowledgeable and experienced, most were not. He had to hold their hand every step of the way. It slowed everything down to a crawl.

He was fortunate enough to have an excellent trainer and mentor when he was starting out over thirty years ago. He was patient and understanding. Somewhere along the way, Paul's patience and understanding had fallen by the wayside. No one wanted to work with him, even other certified technicians.

Paul was rapidly becoming an old white guy no one wanted to be around.....even other old white guys.

He knew he should just bail. He could go to work pretty much anywhere. Have a regular forty-hour workweek. See his wife. Work on his house. The kinds of things everyone else gets to

do. That was only a few years away. He could start collecting his pension at 55, with a penalty. He was seriously thinking about it.

Work was becoming a four-letter word.

"Paul, you have to get an apprentice. I can't fight the union on this one." said his boss.

"A greenhorn? On this project? Forget it."

"Everyone else has kids working with them. You're getting one too."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are and don't you fuck this up either. We're so short of certified technicians, it's scary. Just show them the basics, that's all you have to do."

"Right."

His rookie was a college graduate. That's all he needed. At least kids from the streets know how to use power tools and wrenches. This kid was soft. The kind that had never gotten their hands dirty at work before.

"Hi, I'm Mike. Nice to meet you," he said, shaking Paul's hand.

"Nice to meet you. We've got a lot of work to do, so let's get started."

Within a few hours of working with Mike, Paul knew he was going to have his hands full. He could do basic repairs, but that was about it. He figured he ought to try and get to know the kid since they would be spending so much time together.

The elevator business was Mike's *fallback plan*. He had another full-time job.

He was a hypnotist. Like the kind you see at magic shows and parties.

"Mike, we work long hours here. I'm not sure having another job is going to work out for you."

"Oh, that's ok. The union said I can just work part-time here for right now."

"Part-time? Mike, it's going to take you years to get certified and that's if you work a regular fifty-hour work week."

"Paul, I'm sorry. I make more money at parties and shows than I do here and don't have to pay any taxes. It's all under the table."

"Look, Mike, I'm not trying to tell you what to do, but I need someone that's going to commit to this job full time."

"You're going to have to take it up with the union. They said they're so short-staffed, they don't care how long it takes me. Ten people got hired with me. There are now only three of us left. That's all the local has until next year. Sorry, Paul. This is the way it's got to be." said Mike.

Paul was not too happy. A part-time apprentice? Who the hell were they kidding? This kid was going to be a complete waste of his time.

Hiring nobody is sometimes better than hiring the wrong people. If those are his choices, Paul would take nobody.

Paul's boss was not very sympathetic. He wasn't much older than Mike.

"We've got to put hoist cables in and repair the 911 call box. I need some real help. Can you sub out some of this to the electricians?"

"Paul, electricians can't work on the cables or the call box. Mike's all you've got. You're going to have to make it work."

Paul was fuming. Mike was no help at all. He was more interested in where he was going to headline over the weekend. He would come and go as he pleased. Paul was already in a bad mood. He figured he would just make it so bad for him, he'd quit on his own.

He was constantly yelling at Mike, who returned the favor. The two of them had almost come to blows one morning when Mike spilled his coffee on him.

"You did that on purpose!"

"I'm sorry Paul, it was an accident."

"Get off the damn phone. All you millennials are glued to your phones."

"I'm making money."

"Look, right now, you're on my time and I'm telling you to put that damn phone away!"

"Look, Paul. Everybody warned me about you. I was hoping they were wrong."

"Really, what did they say, if you don't mind me asking?"

"They said you were an old white guy. Man, they weren't kidding."

The situation only deteriorated in the following weeks as the workload increased and Mike's work ethic, or lack thereof, infuriated Paul. It got so bad, he was really ready to walk off the job if they didn't get rid of Mike.

"Either he goes, or I go. Take your pick."

"Paul cut the crap. You aren't going anywhere and you know it. Mike makes fifteen dollars an hour. He's not supposed to have experience, that's why he's here, to learn." said his boss.

"He can learn with someone else."

"They already have apprentices. Union rules are very specific."

"He's useless. I'd be better off working alone."

"Really? You're going to do all the heavy lifting by yourself? Mike has a hundred pounds and thirty years on you. Think about it. How much do those cables weigh?"

Paul knew he was right. Mike was as strong as an ox. Paul was just too old to do this by himself. His back was wrecked from decades of heavy lifting. He didn't like it, but he had to accept it.

"You really clear a thousand dollars a night doing parties?" asked Paul one day while they were working inside the cable chute.

"Sometimes more."

"Hypnotism really works?"

"It definitely works." said Mike

"Mike, you might want to pay attention here and start learning something, cause there ain't no way, you're going to make any real money doing something as ridiculous as hypnotizing people for a living. It's bullshit."

"Hey, turn it up. I love that song," said Mike

"You know this song?"

"Close to you. One of my favorites. Karen had the voice of an angel."

"Yes, she did. There might be some hope for you after all," said Paul as he turned up the radio.

At least the kid could recognize decent music.

Mike hadn't shown up for three days. Paul was hoping and praying he didn't return. Turns out, he was headlining a party in Atlantic City. Mike came back with some big news.

"Sorry to do this to you, Paul. I've got to quit," he said.

Paul was trying hard to contain his excitement. He felt like jumping up and down.

"Really, why?"

"I'm headlining at a casino in Atlantic City. I'll be making more than you do. Sorry man, money talks, and I listen." he said and shook his hand.

"Mike, hypnotism is junk science. It doesn't work. If it did, the government would have hypnotized all of a long time ago. Everything would be different than it is. If witchcraft or

sorcery really worked, we'd be using it on other countries. It's all junk. I just don't understand how you can make money selling something that isn't real?"

"Stop by sometime. I bet I can hypnotize you into doing anything. Hypnotism only works when the person doesn't realize they've been hypnotized. It's all about the trigger."

"Well, good luck. I hope you make it."

"I hope you make it too. You don't seem very happy doing this. You've definitely made me rethink some career choices of mine."

"Mike. The problems our society is facing are gigantic. When I started back in the 90s, everything was different. No one is going to break their backs or get dirty, or work on cars, or lift hoist cables when you can make more money posting workout videos online. Somebody has to do this stuff or the world is going to stop in its tracks."

"I'm sure you're right Paul, but that someone isn't going to be me. I'm at the Stardust Casino on the weekends. You should come and see me. Tickets are on me." said Mike and gave him two free passes to his show.

Mike was finally out of his hair. Paul almost felt like celebrating.

"Mike, you don't want me there. I think hypnotism is bullshit."

"That's exactly why I want you there."

"What are you going to do if this gig doesn't work out?"

"Don't you see, Paul? It's not that you don't believe in hypnotism, you don't believe in me. You think because I won't waste my life doing menial labor, that I'm destined for failure. Just cause I don't think the same way you do, doesn't mean I'm going to fail."

"There aren't any shortcuts to success. Lots of young people think they're going to get rich overnight. They turn into very bitter people once they hit my age. I'm just being realistic."

"You're selling yourself short. Come on, I could always use a heckler in the audience, it makes things interesting."

"You want me to give you shit during your show?"

"Yup. Call me out. I love proving people wrong."

"If that's what you want. *I'll be more than happy to oblige,*" said Paul

Paul took his wife to the show. He was just happy to get a night off. As it turns out, Mike's audience was small. He was in a lounge upstairs. The guests of his had to pay fifty dollars a piece to see him do his thing. Their money would have been better spent buying lottery tickets or going to the steakhouse down below. It was a mix of people, mostly older, on a vacation. Paul

figured they wanted to do something *crazy* like being hypnotized. He just hoped the steakhouse was open when the show was over. He was craving a ribeye.

Mike was a good showman. He knew how to work a crowd. He didn't just tell the guests to close their eyes and count backward from a hundred, he got them talking and asked them where they were from. He kept making unusual hand gestures and whispering in their ears. Soon enough, after about ten minutes, two of the guests nodded off and that's when Mike went to work.

"When I clap my hands, you're going to jump up and down and make chicken noises. Cluck, cluck, cluck. When I clap my hands again, you will stop and leave this trance you are in. Do you understand?"

"Yes," they said in unison.

Mike clapped his hands and the two women began to jump up on stage and make clucking noises. Paul figured it was all staged. Mike probably offered them a slice of the pie if they went along with it.

He clapped his hands again and the ladies immediately stopped moving and had a very confused look on their faces. They sat down as if nothing had happened.

"Now, could I have another volunteer from the audience? You sir?" he said pointing at Paul.

Paul slowly got up and sat down on the chair on the small stage.

"Do you believe in hypnotism, sir?"

"No."

"Even after what we have all seen this evening?"

"Sorry, I don't buy it."

Mike began to make all sorts of unusual movements with his hands. He whispered things in his ear like: *ultra-violence and hurt her*. Paul had no idea what this kid was up to. He didn't bring him all the here to make himself look bad.

"I am going to turn on the Carpenters song *Close to You*. When you hear this song, you will immediately stop what you are doing and sit on the floor. Do you understand?"

"I guess," said Paul.

"Thank you, sir, you may sit back in your seat."

Paul walked back to his seat. Mike turned on the Carpenters. Paul just looked at him and shook his head, sitting back down in his seat. He shook his head.

"This is ridiculous," he said.

"Not to worry folks, the show isn't over, yet."

Mike did manage to hypnotize a few other guests, even convincing one of them to say everything backward, which the guest managed to do. He wasn't sure if they were really hypnotized or simply went along with the madness. All in all, Paul was not very impressed. If he had paid for the tickets, he would have asked for his money back. He worked too hard to throw it away on millennial garbage like this.

He never even saw Mike after the show was over, just making his way down to the steakhouse and ordering rib eye. It was delicious. Expensive, but delicious. What's the point in making good money, if you can't enjoy it every now and then?

One year later, Paul was fast on track to retirement. He had bought out his last remaining two years and had only six months left until he could officially call it quits. He was going to work in Atlantic City at the same casino Mike had headlined the year before. They needed a maintenance man. He got a free room and a free car. All he had to do was keep the lights on and make certain everything was up and running.

He decided to surprise his wife with a gift. She had put up with him for the last thirty years, it was the least he could do. He got her an engraved bracelet for their anniversary. He wanted to do something special for her. He found exactly what he was looking for in a jewelry store near Passaic. The girl working behind the counter was young and pretty. She was fairly knowledgeable about jewelry as well.

"I'll go and engrave it myself."

The music playing in the background was the Carpenter's *Close to You*.

"I love this song. Karen Carpenter was so talented."

"She sure was. She had....."

"*The voice of an angel*," they said in unison.

Paul watched her disappear in the background. He must have blacked out. When he came to, he was standing over the body of the young woman, who had been violently beaten. He had no idea what had just happened. A bolt of both fear and panic ripped through his body. He ran out of the store and got into his work van. His phone rang as he sped away down the street. It was his boss. Maybe he could help clear this up.

"Hey, Paul. Guess who starts work with us on Monday? Remember that punk kid, Mike you had as an apprentice last year? He's back. Guess his hypnotism thing didn't quite pan out." said his boss.

"Oh.....okay. He's back, huh?"

"The kid actually thought he could make a living hypnotizing people. Does anyone really think that crap works?" said his boss.

"I know.....it was ridiculous. Hey, I might not be able to make it to work tomorrow, or the day after that. Something just came up. I'll tell you about it later." he said and hung up. He threw his cell phone out of the window. He had to get home and pack. He would have to leave his wife, just for a while.

Until he could get that damn song out of his head and go to a place that didn't have an extradition treaty with the US. He still didn't believe in hypnotism, though. It was all smoke and mirrors. It only worked on the feeble-minded.....or so he was told.