PLACEBO BUTTON

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FADE IN:

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

JACK LEOPOLD (34) sits with his back slumped against the cab's sleek, silver doors.

The 45th button on the inert elevator's control panel glows.

BEEP. BEEP.

The STOP SWITCH burns hot red.

BEEP. BEEP.

He gazes out the cab's glass walls at the vast cityscape. The city lights faintly twinkle below.

Jack takes a deep breath, pulls out an OLD SERVICE PISTOL, and puts it against his head. He clicks the hammer back.

His finger rubs against the trigger.

Microphone feedback SQUEALS through an intercom.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) This is Lafayette Park Tower security. We've received an alert that the elevator has been manually stopped. Do you need assistance?

With the gun still pressed against his temple, Jack glances up at a security camera covered by a handkerchief.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) Do you need help?

He lowers the gun.

JACK No, I just hit the wrong button.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) Okay, if you need anything when you get to the ground floor let us know. Enjoy your evening.

JACK

Yeah.

He smacks the STOP SWITCH, the red light shuts off and the beeping stops.

The elevator creaks back to life and descends.

JACK (CONT'D) Stupid... you're so fucking stupid.

DING.

The button for the 37th floor lights up.

JACK (CONT'D)

Shit.

Jack pockets the gun, gets to his feet.

He straightens his collar, tries to look presentable... or at least like he wasn't just about to off himself.

The elevator stops. Its doors shoot open.

LOUISA (22) bursts out of the darkened hallway. She's pallid like a ghost, has fiery red hair that tapers to orange tips.

Her face bruised, lip split open. She grasps the elevator wall for leverage leaving a trace amount of blood behind.

JACK (CONT'D) Are you all right? Let me help you.

She stumbles inside.

LOUISA Close the door.

He hits the CLOSE DOOR button, goes to hit the LOBBY button.

LOUISA (CONT'D) Don't, he'll be down there. Take me somewhere else. What apartment do you live at?

JACK Forty-five fifteen.

LOUISA

Please.

Jack pushes the button for the 45th floor.

The elevator moves up.

Louisa wipes some blood off her face. Jack tries to help her. He brushes her hair out of the way.

LOUISA (CONT'D) Don't touch me.

Louisa recoils, she backs away from Jack.

JACK

Sorry.

Louisa backs over to the control panel.

Jack steps toward her.

LOUISA

Get back.

JACK I'm not going to hurt you.

She feverishly taps the button for the next floor.

DING.

The doors open. Louisa staggers out to the hallway.

JACK (CONT'D)

Come on.

Jack hits the OPEN DOOR button, blocks the door with his leg.

LOUISA

Stay away.

Louisa backs up farther.

She stumbles down the dimly lit hall and vanishes into the darkness as quickly as she appeared.

Jack peers down the corridor.

JACK I just want to help.

The door tries to close. It bumps Jack's foot, retracts and tries again... and again...

Finally, Jack pulls his foot back, lets go of the OPEN DOOR button. He pushes the button for the lobby.

The door slides shut and the elevator lowers.

It approaches the 33rd floor.

DING.

It stops, the doors open.

A STRANGER (30s) stands in the hallway, a behemoth of a man. He turns and locks eyes with Jack.

Stranger plods toward the elevator.

Jack slinks into the corner, presses the CLOSE DOOR button. The door slowly glides to a close... until the stranger forces his foot in the door's path. The door slides open.

He steps inside.

Jack and the stranger square off in opposite corners like two boxers waiting for the bell.

STRANGER

Twenty-six.

JACK

Sorry?

STRANGER Twenty-sixth floor, please.

Jack taps the 26th button on the control panel.

The elevator moves down.

STRANGER (CONT'D) You know if something was wrong with the elevator?

JACK Not that I'm aware of.

STRANGER I was trying to get on for at least ten minutes. Maybe it got jammed or something.

JACK That's probably it.

STRANGER Been hiking my ass down the stairs this whole time, checking each floor as I went. Where'd you start?

Jack doesn't want to say.

STRANGER (CONT'D) What's the matter? Don't want to talk to strangers?

JACK

Forty-fifth.

STRANGER Oh, Mister Penthouse.

JACK It's not mine, it was my parents'. I'm just cleaning out a few things.

STRANGER Let me ask you something: Did anyone get on and off before me?

JACK

No.

STRANGER You sure? I'm looking for this girl, she's about yay high...

Stranger holds his hand out to the same height as Louisa.

STRANGER (CONT'D) ... real pale, early twenties. The most ridiculous dye job you've ever seen; a red to orange ombré. When she's got her hair tied back and you're taking her from behind it looks like you're tugging on a fox's tail.

JACK No, man. I haven't seen her.

Stranger takes note of the blood smeared on the wall. He trudges over to Jack, gets in his face.

STRANGER Don't lie to me.

He grabs Jack by the collar. The stranger's inflamed and cracked knuckles squeeze tighter.

JACK

Just relax.

Jack tries to inconspicuously reach for the gun in his pocket. The stranger presses Jack hard against the wall.

STRANGER

You don't have to be a part of this. What floor was she on?

Beat.

JACK Forty-third.

STRANGER You're a shit liar.

DING.

26th floor. The doors open.

The stranger lets go of Jack.

STRANGER (CONT'D) I'm sure she'll turn up. This is her floor, anyway.

Stranger walks to the elevator's threshold. Jack grabs hold of his gun, but keeps it hidden in his pocket.

Stranger runs his hand along the control panel, pressing all of the floor buttons.

He wipes the blood off the wall with his shirt sleeve and walks out of the elevator.

STRANGER (O.S.) (CONT'D) Wish me luck.

The doors close. The elevator moves down.

Jack props himself against the wall. His hands tremble. He stumbles to the control panel, pushes the EMERGENCY CALL.

DING.

25th floor. Jack grips his gun as the doors open. He surveys the empty hallway. The doors close, elevator lowers.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) This is Lafayette Park Tower--

JACK -- Yeah, I know. I've been assaulted in the elevator. SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) Are you currently in danger?

JACK No, he got off.

DING.

Doors open, empty hall. Doors close, the elevator moves down.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) How badly are you injured, do you need medical attention?

JACK There was a girl who looked like she needed help.

SECURITY GUARD (V.O.) (filtered) Remain in the elevator until it gets to the ground floor. We'll contact the authorities and be waiting for you when you get down.

JACK

Okay.

Jack depresses the EMERGENCY CALL button.

DING.

The doors open. An OLD MAN (70s) hobbles in, he looks at the glowing FLOOR BUTTONS. He glares at Jack.

OLD MAN Is this some kind of joke?

JACK I don't know.

OLD MAN What do you mean you "don't know"?

JACK I... I don't know.

OLD MAN

Asshole.

Old man lumbers off the elevator. The doors close.

SERIES OF SHOTS - JACK IN THE ELEVATOR

DING. The doors open and close. The elevator lowers. Jack paces around.

DING. The doors open and close. The elevator lowers. Jack leans against the glass wall.

DING. The doors open and close. The elevator lowers. Jack bangs his head against the glass wall.

DING. The doors open and close. The elevator lowers. Jack hold his head -- ow, that fucking hurt.

DING. The doors open and close. The elevator lowers. Jack sits down, looks at the gun -- not such a bad idea after all.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

INT. ELEVATOR / ELEVATOR LOBBY - NIGHT

Jack's back where he started: slumped against the cab's sleek, silver doors.

DING.

As the doors open, Jack's upper body falls backward. His back smacks against the lobby's marble floors. With his legs still in the elevator, he lays there halfway in, halfway out.

The doors try to close. They bump against Jack's side, retract and try again... and again... and again.

A SECURITY GUARD (30s) stands over him.

SECURITY GUARD Sir, stand up.

The security guard helps Jack to his feet.

JACK Did you get help?

SECURITY GUARD Have you been drinking?

Jack doesn't answer.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D) Whatever. Just stop pranking us.

JACK

I'm not.

SECURITY GUARD Yeah, well I checked the tape. You know what I saw?

The security guard walks in the elevator, goes over to the camera and pulls the handkerchief off. He hands it to Jack.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D) Nothing. There's no sign of damage to the elevator.

He looks Jack over.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D) No sign of an assault or injury to you, no distress calls from anybody. In fact, the only call I got was a complaint from a nice, older gentleman who said someone was messing with the elevator's floor buttons by making it stop at every level. No anything about that?

JACK The guy that beat --

SECURITY GUARD -- Uh, huh. What floor do you live on?

JACK I don't live here, it was my parents'. Forty-fifth floor.

SECURITY GUARD Yeah, you didn't look familiar. What're their names?

JACK Gary and Elise.

SECURITY GUARD Oh, the Leopolds. I'm sorry for your loss. They were good people. (beat) Just go sleep off whatever you're on. Okay?

Security guard pats Jack on the shoulder. He walks away.

SECURITY GUARD (O.S.) (CONT'D) And don't fuck with the elevator no more. The doors close with Jack inside. Jack stands there for a beat. He checks his gun, pushes the button for the 26th floor. The elevator rockets upward. Higher... higher... higher. DING. 26th floor. The doors open. The stranger forces his way in. STRANGER Mister Penthouse, didn't expect to see you so soon. WHAM. The stranger punches Jack in the face with a pair of knucks. Jack's nose CRACKS and explodes in a hematic fury. He crashes to the floor. The stranger walks in, he looks down at GARY LEOPOLD (67) sprawled out on the ground. Jack is gone. STRANGER (CONT'D) What floor? LOUISA (0.S.) Forty-five. Louisa walks in, uninjured. She hits the button. The stranger digs in Gary's pocket, pulls out his wallet. His driver's license reads: GARY LEOPOLD. LOUISA (CONT'D) What are you doing? Just wait 'til we get in the apartment. STRANGER That's what I'm doing, ya dumb broad; looking for the apartment number on his address.

> LOUISA Well he told me, you dumb brute. Forty-five fifteen.

The stranger continues to rummage through his wallet.

STRANGER Look at this, retired pork. Didn't think piggies could fly this high on a gubment salary.

Louisa taps the stranger with her foot.

LOUISA Hey, he's got something.

Gary struggles to raise the OLD SERVICE PISTOL, but the stranger stomps on his wrist.

The stranger takes hold of the gun.

STRANGER

Come on, now.

He forces Gary to sit up.

The stranger presses the pistol against Gary's head.

CLICK.

CUT TO:

Jack sits in the elevator, alone. He presses the OLD SERVICE PISTOL against his head.

He takes a deep breath, his finger rubs against the trigger.

Microphone feedback SQUEALS through an intercom.

BANG.

FADE OUT.

THE END.