

TRAPPED AT PANTHEACON

by

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Trapped at PantheaCon
A short story by Avery Goodman

Dedicated to PantheaCon, staff and guests alike, Ancient Ways, the San Jose Doubletree Hotel, and to Pagans everywhere, real and imaginary.

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And we two lovers shall not sit afar,
Critics of nature, but the joyous sea
Shall be our raiment, and the bearded star
Shoot arrows at our pleasure! We shall be
Part of the mighty universal whole,
And through all æons mix and mingle with the Kosmic Soul!

- Oscar Wilde, "Panthea"

For Pagans, any time is a good time to gather, learn, worship, celebrate or just plain party. There are many festivals and gatherings all throughout the year and all over the country; PantheaCon is one of the best. Virtually all Pagan affiliations are represented there, from Gardnerian Wiccans to the Minoans, from Kemetics to Discordians and everyone in-between. PantheaCon is also unusual as it is an event held indoors in a large hotel. The Doubletree sign stands high on the side of the great building. The hotel's logo of two interlocked trees form a portal welcoming all the Pagans to the annual convention.

Cassie looked up at the pattern of triangles above the portico outside the hotel lobby. The shuttle had just dropped her off and she was about to enter the glass doors. A gentleman, with considerably more luggage than she, struggled to keep the door open as he tried to enter. She held the door with one foot as he scooted his bags inside, giving a nod of gratitude. She followed him into the hotel, pausing once inside to soak up the whole experience; the building, all the people, and what this convention really means. The song, "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," by The Animals was playing on a radio. Effusively she inhaled and strode to complete the registration processes.

Cassie was a very strong woman; a leader, an activist, an adventurer, a fighter, bold, daring, headstrong, outspoken, forceful, but above all, a Dianic. For now, however, she could only wait in line.

The man was none other than James (he wouldn't have his introduction any other way). James was a Thelemite and proud of it. He was less jovial than a true Rabelaisian, more interested in controlling forces and gaining stature, while retaining a hint of boyish prank with his dark menacing beard. James brought himself and his baggage to a room on the fourth floor where he would be staying. His friend Ricky, a Chaos Magician, was already in the room.

"Want some cookies?" Ricky asked.

James quickly replied, "Heh, no. I'm just gonna put my stuff down and go to my first workshop."

"The next time slot starts in forty-five minutes. Are you sure you're going to have enough time? You still have to register."

"I'm gonna run down there and do that right now."

"What workshop is it?"

"I'm going to Intro to Pagan Networking. Wanna come?"

"Not really. I'm more interested in checking out girls in costumes."

"The costumes get much better later in the weekend."

"Yeah, I know. Well, maybe I'll pop into Mask Making 101."

"So you can look at girls from behind the mask?"

"Mostly so I can change myself and see how others change around me. It's all in the eye of the beholder." James left the room and then Ricky called to him.

"Hey you forgot your room key."

"Oh thanks and he grabbed the key, "I'm forgetting things already" he chuckled.

"Let's not have it like last year when you kept forgetting everything."

"I'll try to be careful about that."

"Please, or you're gong to get into trouble. You'll forget something important and be trapped at PantheaCon forever."

Cassie finished registration quickly and saw her friend Rayanne, a Sister of Avalon. Cassie said to Rayanne, "I think we could go to the workshop in the Chardonnay room."

"I would like that. I get the feeling it will be packed. It's the one on finding the Goddess within. It involves a trance journey."

"That's probably something I do not need. I want to go but will only stay if it is not too full."

When they reached the workshop they immediately saw the room was indeed stuffed. Rayanne really wanted to stay but Cassie got frustrated with the crowd and left. Cassie followed her instinct to Intro to Pagan Networking.

After his wait in a slow at first then fast line, James arrived in the San Simeon room where the Intro to Pagan Networking workshop had just begun. The workshop was led by Pythia who asked everyone to introduce themselves by saying their name and what path they follow. This was answered by each person in the entwined circle giving responses such as “My name is Feron and I’m an Amythystian,” “I’m Jorg and I follow a Norse path,” “I’m Eglantine, I’m a British Traditional Witch,” “Call me Willow, I’m with Reclaiming,” “My name’s Amelia. I practice Circle Craft.”

James was about to go next when the door swung open and Cassie entered. She announced, “I came here because the Chardonnay room was too crowded.”

Pythia addressed the new attendee, “Hello. You’re right on time. We we’re just introducing ourselves. I’d like everyone to say their name and what path they follow.” Cassie had a strong urge to interrupt the workshop leader the whole time. Without missing a beat, Cassie spoke “My name is Cassie and I’m a Dianic.”

This caused one vocal and two or three silent mumbling remarks. James realized he had made the one non-silent remark and quickly withdrew his attention inward. Shaking it off, Pythia turned toward James, indicating that he should go next.

“I am James and I’m a Thelemite.”

Again, two or three silent and one vocal mumbled remarks followed. Amelia spoke up, “I thought Thelemites did not consider themselves Pagan.”

James answered, “Well, I do, because I am polytheist and my practice does have much to do with the Old Religion. Not all Thelemites would call themselves Pagan and not all think of Thelema as a religion.”

Cassie fired, “Well not all Pagans are polytheist. Many Dianics are not. My practice has evolved to be much more monotheistic personally because that’s how I truly feel. But, not all Dianics believe that way. I see Diana as all things and she is complete unto herself.” She had the room controlled but as it settled she realized it was time to move on to the next person.

“Technically, you’re a pantheist”

Cassie laughed internally. She was very pleased with the new definition.

In the remainder of the workshop, we learned that Enid practiced Night Magick, Melody was a Kitchen Witch, Faizah followed Vodun, and Aria practiced Blue Star Witchcraft.

At the end of the workshop Cassie turned to the left as she left. She walked outside and then all the way around the back to the Bayshore side of the hotel. She looked over the information tables and ventured to the Vendor room. A little shopping would do some

good. The others went their own way, and James went his own way, which was, in this case, to the right. James went to the Green room where he met some very helpful people.

PantheaCon had amplified into a madcap romp of liveliness and *joie de vivre*. The Pagans formed a hotel wide interlace, a cat's cradle lattice of comings and goings, characters and costumes. A vampyre in a leather mini-skirt (with no panties, trust me) graced past the Green Man in conversation with Isis. A Spartan posed for several photographs. On one side of the large fireplace in the lobby, Willow could not decide which workshop to go to next. On the other side, Wanda was attempting pyromancy and saw the shape of a mouse in the flames. All attention turned to a parade of men in full kilt.

"I can tell you one thing. Working here does have its fringe benefits," said Kumiko as she admired the kilted men.

Kumiko, a member of the hotel staff, was kept fairly busy during the convention. She was not an especially religious person but rapidly came to appreciate the Pagans she was serving and how colorful they were. She was quickly needed upstairs.

The second floor ball room lights were controlled from the same panel. The problem with this was that if someone turned the lights down in one room, they went low in the other rooms. Kumiko was busy working on the lights issue. She was tired of all the complaints. "If only we could use candles," they would say. One solution was a lantern she put away in a closet some time ago. Fortunately, it still worked, and she gave it to one of the rooms.

Helena, a Witch, found her friends talking in a group in front of the events schedule display board. Helena announced, "I just met Avery. He's...uh...he's the author."

"What was he like?" Rocco, a Stregone, wanted to know.

"Very surreal. He said that the characters are not entirely fictional but neither are the readers." She paused "Oh, and he's also passing out these 'Elevate All Together,' ribbons" and handed him one, then turned to greet another friend. "Hi, Milly. Where were you?"

"I was waiting for pizza but the line was too long. So, I just went to the Coffee Garden and got a sandwich, a country fried ham and a fried egg on top of a cheeseburger, nestled in a sesame seed bun, and doused with horseradish."

"That was a mouthful."

"It certainly was."

"Hey, look," Mildred said as she pointed at the schedule. "There's a thing tonight on astrology."

“Can’t. There’s a secret party in room 358. It’s being thrown by Gomer, the guy who led the class on the Ophidian Tradition and Kundalini.”

As night drew on several night-time activities occurred. There was a melodious and stinging rock concert by Hexanne; a room thundering with dancing and drumming; a sensual red lipstick and leather ritual by Dionysia Gnostica; and of course there was the Green Fairy room.

Luna examined her glass of absinthe, “It’s cool. It’s all foggy.”

“Just like your head will be. Now drink.” This was Hawk, but it was hard to hear him.

“So what do you think of PantheaCon?” Shannon, a Druid, asked.

“I think it’s a wonderful expression of Paganism.”

“Yes. Yes, and what is your vision of Paganism?”

Kulan, a Mahlorian, had to swallow, then quoted “Mountains toppling evermore, into seas without a shore.”

“Seas that restlessly aspire, surging, unto skies of fire,” said Shannon, finishing the line.

He and Shannon laughed delightedly at each other.

The next day, after the morning had progressed past any necessary recovery, the workshops, classes, rituals and revelry began anew. Cassie found Rayanne near the sushi bar.

“Hi. I’m on my way to the auction,” Rayanne said.

“Listen, Rayanne, I’m going to use the new service elevator over there,” Cassie asserted.

“I don’t think we’re allowed to use it.”

“I know, I know. I’m just going to go up to the room and come back. I need to get something in a hurry and there’s not enough time to wait for the regular elevators.”

“Alright, Cassie. Just be careful.”

“I don’t think I’ll get caught.”

Cassie vanished. She must have managed to sneak into the service elevator, for Rayanne did not see where she went.

James was walking towards the Cedar room when he was stopped by a badge checker. “Oh no! I forgot my name badge downstairs. I must have left it at the last workshop in the Monterey room all the way on the other side.”

James hurried to find a quick way down. He did not use the stairs near the ballrooms and was almost across the Overland Route when he realized he should have. One glance at the huge mass outside the elevators indicated that it was going to be a long wait. James hustled to find an alternative route to the first floor. A hotel employee caught his eye. This was Kumiko. He grabbed her to ask, “Is there any quick way to the first floor, I need to get down there right away and there’s a line a mile long at the elevators.”

She made a snap decision to help him and said, “There’s our new service elevator around that corner,” and she pointed. “I’ll let you use that this once.”

James sighed in relief, “Aw, thank you so much! Whew!” He started to run off but stopped and turned around. “By the way, what did one elevator say to the other elevator? He paused in his delivery, then grinned and finished with, ‘I think I’m coming down with something.’”

James ran to the service elevator. On his way, Ricky stopped him. James explained to Ricky that he was going to use the service elevator and would be back later. When James arrived at the elevator he pushed the little button and was surprised to see Cassie inside when the door opened.

“I’m going up,” Cassie said.

“I was going down, but I’ll go up with you just to avoid any conflicts,” James said as he walked in.

The two anticipated reaching their destinations. The elevator began to make its ascent. They were both facing the door but James started to turn his head to peek at her. He was about to break the silence when the elevator slowed and shook like new driver learning to use a stick shift. The whole elevator began thrusting, pulsating and filled with an aura of tension. The heavily pumping chamber jolted up a few feet, stopped for a half second, jolted up another couple feet, quaked, then a huge rip was heard and the elevator plummeted down the shaft like a nose dive. An eruption of electric sparks trailed from the torn cable on the other end. Cassie screamed and the sudden displacement of gravity filled their stomachs. James clung to the floor and Cassie instinctively curled into a back tuck until finally the whole ark crashed. It was only after a few disorientating moments that the two passengers realized there were no longer any lights.

“Are you alright?” his voice and head shook.

Warily Cassie answered, “I am okay, I think,” and she apprehensively let her body uncoil.

James wobbled up, "It's dark. The electricity must have gone out when the cable broke. I'll try to find a light."

"Never mind. I have one. I always bring a light with me," Cassie said and produced a small flashlight.

"You know, in England they call it a torch. Look, I can prop it up there. Above the door so it points down." He took the flashlight and placed it up.

"We've got to get out of here," said Cassie almost sarcastically.

With straining effort they endeavored to open the doors. This produced no change in the doors' condition. They were left to guess that the fall and loss of electricity had caused the doors to be stuck. They both made several long cries akin to "DOWN HERE! HEY! HEYYYYY! HELP! PLEEEEEEASE HEEEEELP!"

After some time of shouting and loud banging on all the walls and as much of the ceiling as they could reach, they both sulked, sighed, and abandoned the effort.

Cassie suggested, "You should check the roof. Don't elevators have trap doors in the top?"

"I think so." He reached up to search.

James continued, "I can't find one, there's nothing at all up here except the broken lights."

"What? I can't believe that. That's stupid."

"Well they did say the service elevator was new. Here, around here I can feel, it seems like there's a place they're gonna put one. There's nine nails up here." As he continued to explore the ceiling with his hands she mumbled something. "What'd you say?" he inquired.

"I was just thinking I can't believe I'm stuck in here with you. I mean, do you realize you and I have absolutely nothing in common?"

"Well, no, not really, besides being Pagan. It's just that you're a feminist man-hater."

"You really don't know much about Dianic beliefs, do you?"

They both sat down, one in each of the back corners.

"I just don't see why you take the male out of the equation," said he.

"Maybe because that's how you think; that it's all just an equation."

“When you remove the male you can’t have power.”

“We are not against men. Listen, I know what goes on in your sex magick orgy camps. The only way you know how to treat women is by treating them like whores! Well, you're the whore! You're all a bunch of sick felching sadists.”

“That’s not true...wait, *WHAT?*”

“I’m sorry. To be fair I’ve never actually seen any of that,” Cassie conceded.

“Listen, we are not all perverted sexual deviants. In fact, if you don’t get all that out of the way then you’re not going to be a successful magician. Trouble is, most people get stuck in Venus not realizing that the other spheres are even more splendid.”

“But, you’re all so megalomaniacal. You just live in your power trips.”

“That’s all part of it. The important thing is to have all the ego stuff and to get it out of the way. One should deal with it early on and work through it. In some ways it is not about restriction but about working with the inert powers. It’s like bringing the fallen back up only it’s your own responsibility, but sometimes I feel like hidden powers help along the way. Many don’t realize that the real power is past all that. The real power rests in Our Lady Babalon.”

Cassie looked puzzled. “Babalon? Isn’t she the goddess that you call a whore?”

“The Whore of Babalon, yes. I suppose the term is unfortunate. It really means that she is all embracing and that she will make love to you, to anyone, no matter who you are. She is the lady with the mead cup in another sense. I just learned that at a workshop today.”

“So she’s all loving and all embracing. You still shouldn’t call her a whore,” Cassie said huffily. “You do that because you want to pretend you have power over her. That’s what pornography is about.”

“What do you mean?”

“Pornography comes out of fear, the fear that men have of not being attracted by women; The fear of impotency. Powerlessness.”

“I’ll admit that it allows men to have the fantasy of having power and dominating women. But, that’s all it is, a *fantasy*. Actually doing it is something else. A woman can actually take a man’s power, especially if you’re doing magick.”

Now it was Cassie’s turn to ask, “What do you mean?”

“Usually a woman may feel power during sex magick. She then has a sort of addiction to it and will cling to the man to get it from him. What’s worse is when she puts her hindering patterns on him.”

“You know, the Dianic movement is trying to help empower women. The sort of problems you describe in magick, I see in relationships. I think your problem is you’re trying to use the woman to get somewhere in magick, to reach higher consciousness or something. Maybe you just turn to sex magick because your romantic relationships don’t work out.”

“You just said the same thing happens in relationships. You say men use women to get somewhere in magick. Well maybe women use men to get somewhere in romance.”

“Well, be that as it may, what I have learned from my practice and from the Goddess is that when you give willingly and sacredly, there is no loss of power, of energy.”

A tremor in the hotel was hardly perceived by anyone. However, when friends do not turn up for several hours, people take notice. Rayanne and Ricky were concerned about the well-being of their lost companions. They both met each other after investigating what could have happened to Cassie and James. Ricky and Rayanne found out from the other that they each had someone who had disappeared. They determined that the new service elevator was where both of their friends had been headed. Upon opening the door they made a devastating discovery.

“Holy...” a stunned Ricky said.

Alarmed, Rayanne said, “Do you think they’re still alive?”

They agreed to get help in next to no time. The first hotel employee they found was Kumiko who immediately informed her superiors of the terrible accident. A group began to amass at the scene.

Doubletree staff and PantheaCon attendees were spreading the news briskly. More and more people surrounded the open service elevator shaft. Many voices were jabbering, and it was hard to tell who was speaking.

“Can they force the doors open and escape?”

“No. No, they can’t. That would be bad. Unfortunately, they landed at the third sub-basement which is flooded. If they open the door all the water will rush in and kill them. They can’t swim out because, well, because the stairway below the second sub-basement has been sealed,” Kumiko explained.

“Dear Gods!”

“I’m sorry. No one is supposed to use the service elevators except for staff, and then only one person at a time. We had to seal the staircase because of the health inspector. There’s nothing we can do about all that water and it would have cost a fortune to drain it and we’d lose business. We only use the first basement and never the sub-basements below it and there’s never been a problem.”

Soon the lantern arrived. Kumiko held it inside the elevator shaft.

“Wow. I can see it all the way down there.”

Jorg leaned over and humorously said, “Elevator go down the hooooole.”

“Can’t they just escape through the trap door in the roof of the elevator?”

“This one has no trap door.”

“Why not?”

“Because the builders are coming to install it...on Tuesday.”

“We can’t wait that long. They’ll die in there if they don’t kill each other first.”

“And then there’s the question of...um...what they will do when they have to...you know, go.”

“There is no question. The answer is we must get them out of there.”

“Sooner or later they will run out of air.”

“The hotel is doing what they can. They said the Fire Department can’t come with a crane because there is no room in the building for it. They could come in from the roof but they’d have to take the roof off and that could take hours. We don’t have that kind of time.”

Helena said, “Is Skylar around? He can figure something out.”

Shannon said, “He’s visiting the Rosicrucian Museum.”

“I thought he was a ceremonialist, not a Rosicrucian.”

“He is. I mean he’s not. I mean he is a ceremonialist. He’s just interested in their symbolism and rites.”

“So he can steal them no doubt”

“I think we need to concentrate on the problem at hand. Do you know anyone else who’s smart?”

“It seems that with all this magick around, we could do something.”

“Yeah, I’ll sprinkle some fairy dust on them.”

“You mean pixie dust. Real Fae do not have dust,” Finette said.

“And real pixies do?”

“It’s too bad we can’t light candles. I know a great return-to-me spell.”

“How is that gonna work? Isn’t that like, a love spell?”

“We could modify it, so they return to us. Then they would all love us.”

“I got it!” said Kader, a Draconian. He waved his arms almost like a conductor toward the elevator and commanded “Drizzle, drizzle, drizzle, drome, time for those two to come home.”

“Are we to try other magic words? Shazam? Cimota? Xyzzy? Mellon? Perhaps we should try Rise Sesame!” said Dragon, an Eclectic who wore a green button.

“If we all concentrated, we could raise them out with our minds.”

“What if we lowered a something to pull them up with, like some rope?”

“How will that work?”

“Look down there,” Hawk held the lantern, “See? The way it landed, we can get rope underneath it, around and behind each of the back corners. It will go between the tracks.”

A few more people came to look at what he meant.

“That’s a long way down. Where will we get enough rope?”

“I...uh...maybe I can help. You see, I have a huge coil of rope in the truck.”

“Why do you have so much rope?”

“It’s...uh, it’s bondage play rope. I sell it. It’s very *very* strong and there’s more than enough.”

“What is your company called?”

“Fire From Heaven”

“Oh aye, I use your brand all the time.”

As soon as the rope was brought in, people began unrolling it. Amelia made a large loop out of the end.

“Will this work? It’s big enough to go around one of the back corners.”

“Yeah, I think, well...” she held one piece of the rope and looked at everyone working together, “You know something? A net is stronger than its own fibers.”

“Great idea. We’ll make two big nets, one to wrap around each of the back corners.”

“Yes! Then we can attach them to the ends of two long pieces of rope, two for each net. Then there will be four groups pulling. It should work.”

“How will we hold the elevator in place once we get it up here?”

“Well, I noticed there’s this switch here, under the button. When you press it, those other levers and little slab things extend to hold it in place.”

“What are those anyway?”

“Those are supposed to extend automatically, to catch a falling elevator,” Kumiko explained.

“Then why the heck didn’t they?”

“They aren’t hooked up yet.”

“Let me guess. Tuesday?”

“Tuesday.”

“Just be sure someone pushes that switch.”

Then over, under, through, they tied the nets. Alan of Green Craft even remembered to tie up nine knots on each of the four rope ends.

Within the confines of the elevator, James, for the first time in a long time, cried.

“You’re making it worse” Cassie said defensively.

“Hard to make it worse than it is.”

“I doubt they will save us in time. I never thought this would happen to me.”

“They won’t make it in time. We’ll be stuck here until we...until we...” his voice trailed.

James stood up straight. He suddenly wanted to prove himself. He attempted to break through the ceiling for a short while. Cassie watched him straining to change the status quo.

“James, stop it! It’s hopeless,” she said.

“This is a total waste of time, but we can’t give up. If we give up then...then...” he never finished but they both knew what he meant.

Cassie drooped dejectedly. She believed they could never escape. *Never*. The word sent chills down her back. They could *never* get out; they could *never* be rescued. She gasped, “I can’t...breathe!” She began sobbing wildly, “I’ve got to get out of here. Please, somebody get me out of here!”

James was stunned to see someone as strong as Cassie like this. He had to be the strong one now.

“Cassie! Snap out of it. We have to cope.”

“I can’t cope. I want to go home,” she wailed.

“Calm down. If I can, you can. You think I want to be down here?”

“I can’t help it.” she kept wailing. “We could die in here. I don’t want to die in here.”

“Nobody wants to die. That’s why we have to help each other. You’re a strong woman. I can’t believe you’re afraid.” He began rocking her gently. He went on, “In our teachings we say that fear is failure, so be without fear. Sometimes magick can be scary. It’s kinda like when you call a girl for the first time. A lot of times I’m really scared.”

“I’m really glad you’re here with me, James. It wouldn’t be nice to be alone,” Cassie revealed.

He took her hand, “Let’s think of the others. Our friends.”

Her voice shook “I hope they can help us.”

A moment passed.

Cassie continued thoughtfully, “You know, I can be pretty political sometimes. I guess it can be easy to put myself out there and forget about what’s really important. When I

listen to the Goddess she doesn't want politics...she wants...she wants to give." She had to stop to breathe slower.

"Activism and politics can be a good thing. It's done a lot for minority groups in history, but it can be taken too far. No one likes to hear what's wrong all the time."

"I'm feeling kind of giddy," Cassie said.

"And light headed and tired. Do you know what that means?"

"Yeah. We're running out of air." She waited to reflect briefly and then asked, "What do you think it's like to die?"

"I don't know. Thelema aside, I think we can go to...another world, I guess. Another type of world. I think it's up to us."

"I do believe in reincarnation. I think in some way we give birth to ourselves. But, like you are saying, maybe we can choose what happens to us."

"When I die, I want to be placed under a yew tree."

"A lot of good that does down here."

"I just think it's important." He was silent for a moment and then said, "I can't help notice that the word Diana is similar to the word Dhyāna."

"What's that?"

"It's the state of union between subject and object. It's like a continuous flow of information from one thing, a constant connection and the ego gets eradicated. In one sense it is a state beyond limitations or beyond the linear. In another sense it is the union of the self with the non-self."

"Well, that is like Diana. She in her higher aspect is the Mother of all, the being that gave birth to male and female. She was before their separation."

"Aha! Diana is the High Priestess, the path joining the self with the Monad."

He looked like a king to her. "She is the force that, upon surrender, brings you to the highest," said Cassie wisely. "I'm sure there is a reason for all this. Even the masculine has a reason," and she nodded in passive agreement.

James felt a calm sadness. He had nearly chosen to give up, to drift away into the void, but something blocked his passage. He knew it was not fear this time. Was it Cassie? Was it Ricky? Was it everyone else at PantheaCon?

Cassie started crying again, “I don’t want to die. I want life to stay.”

“You know, when I was a boy I saw my first sunflower. There it was, in full bloom, big, bright and beautiful. Then after a little while it had wilted, and faded, and soon after that...it was gone. I think I’ve just realized that everything fades and dies. Riches, power, even life. But you know what? I think we are very lucky to have been a part of it.” James felt some kind of relief upon saying this.

She said, “Let’s just keep concentrating on our friends and all the other people.”

“Just thinking about them makes me feel better...and braver,” he said.

“Let’s take it easy. There’s not much air left,” Cassie reminded him.

“Just don’t go to sleep, Cassie. We can’t go to sleep.”

The two, now cradling each other, drifted slowly in and out of a dream state. They could not tell between dream and awake.

Up on the first floor, the entire group had lowered the rope net and managed to catch it under the fallen elevator. The combined Pagans held the four lines of rope and began tugging. After a few minutes the heavy elevator had not risen an inch.

Then Skylar entered from one of the side doors and a few others came to meet him.

“Hey guys, want some halva?” then he noticed the large confused crowd carrying the long white ropes, “Hey? What’s going on?”

“We’re trying to pull up the service elevator. A couple people are trapped in there and it’s all the way on the bottom. Come over here.”

Skylar assessed the situation. They told him that they were all pulling and that they could not lift the elevator. Skylar figured out the problem. “Okay, the groups holding the ropes around the back left corner need to cross over to the right side and the ropes on the right need to go on the left side. That way you have more leverage and the weight is distributed. You need to form a cross for extra support.”

As all the Pagans obeyed his instruction, Skylar grabbed a section of the rope.

“Alright now PULL!” several commanded.

Aria spoke up “Hey! We need a chant to make the work easier. It will help us to build energy. I got one! We can say ‘elevate all together.’”

The Pagans began to sway and chant in unison, pulling with all their might at the ropes in their hands. “Elevate all together, elevate all together, elevate all together...” The Pagans

pulled for all they were worth. As the chant grew in strength so did it give strength to those using it. The group became like a bull, pulling harder and mightier. The chant continued and the Pagans strained even harder against the ropes.

Suddenly, the small room arose off the ground. James and Cassie both awoke realizing the elevator was lifting up and they were being rescued.

Cassie gasped, "Oh, thank God. Thank God!"

He felt one of her tears on his face. It reminded him of the hope and faith he once forgot. A quiet voice inside him that he had not heard in a long time told him that stillness is sometimes the best move.

The two held each other and sat looking up at the ceiling. The flashlight had fallen but that did not matter. They both knew that their whole lives lay above them. Soon the doors would be open and they would be free.

Up, up it rose.

"Elevate all together! Elevate All Together! ELEVATE ALL TOGETHER!"

The team lifted the elevator the last few inches and Faizah operated the manual levers so that the elevator could rest on them. Ricky and Rayanne parted the doors and the two bound inside writhed and wrestled to exit their trap. They both inhaled a mountain of new air which merged into a screeching birth cry. They were free.

Pagans and hotel staff alike cheered and celebrated. Many were asking several questions at once of the two survivors, as if they were pop stars who had announced an engagement. James and Cassie were each surrounded by their own clusters of congregation. They were both so ecstatic it was hard to give their adoring public accounts of what happened down there.

"That was amazing. I thought we were going to die" James professed.

"We thought that too," Ricky said surely.

Cassie tried to tell everyone at once, "I could not believe it. We were caught down there with no way to get out. It was unbelievable."

"I'm glad you made it." Rayanne said with relief and gratitude.

"It is such a powerful thing to witness. All these Pagans, these people, united," said Kumiko with tears in her eyes. "I wish now to be a part of it."

"'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished," said Feron.

They all rejoiced and James' and Cassie's friends all gave them wonderful long hugs. Many of the others did too.

At the end of the celebration, when most of the others were talking to each other, James wandered over to a still buzzing Cassie.

“So, see ya next year?” James joyfully asked.

Cassie assuredly replied, “Oh, you can count on it!”

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