

The Mathematician and The Philosopher

By

Gordon Blitz

An elevator with two occupants: one man is twenty years old (WADE) dressed in a sport jacket and tie; the other is nineteen (GIDEON) dressed in a costume of a Greek philosopher (toga and sandals). They are both wearing glasses. The elevator inexplicably stops at every floor, and Wade, worried about being late for an appointment, is starting to sweat.

WADE

Hey, do you happen to have a tissue?

GIDEON

I always carry these around for emergencies.

GIDEON hands WADE a tissue.

WADE

Thanks.

WADE wipes his face.

GIDEON

I have a whole array of items in my bag here. Mints and chewing gum. You should try one. Leftover habit from when I smoked. People used to complain about that smoky smell. Now they come in handy for bad breath. I also have this spray and cloth to clean my glasses.

WADE looks disgusted when GIDEON mentions smoking. Then WADE blows into his hand, checking his breath.

WADE

Okay. If you don't mind, let me try a mint. And while you're at it, I need to clean my glasses.

GIDEON hands over a mint and glass spray and cloth.

WADE

Aren't you concerned about the elevator stopping at every floor?

GIDEON

Doesn't bother me. I'm early for my appointment.

GIDEON starts laughing. WADE looks angry.

GIDEON

It's funny how I've given you so many things. What would have happened if I wasn't sharing the elevator

with you? I can see by your face that you're wondering why I'm laughing. I was actually thinking about how funny it is being in this elevator. I'm a philosophy major, and I'm always trying to make a coherent sense out of the whole.

WADE

Let me stop you there. Can you tell me first why you're dressed this way?

GIDEON

Oh, you mean this getup? It's part of my philosophy final exam to not only think like a philosopher but to actually *look* like one. We're holding a debate here in this building as part of the final, and it will be between two philosophers. We're supposed to pick sides.

WADE

I guess that sort of makes sense. Okay, getting back to the meaning of being in this elevator and the humor of it all.

GIDEON

So, I realized that when the elevator door first opens, in a way we're taking a leap when we enter. We're leaving the old reality behind when the door closes. And when we press the button, we activate energy to take us to our desired level. When this machinery moves, we cannot influence the outcome. It forces us to let go. Then suddenly we get to our floor, the door opens, and we're at a different level, a different reality.

WADE

You make it sound like we're in a time machine.

GIDEON

Exactly! The whole thing seems humorous to me. Like we are here together, two strangers, taking this trip together. Like a road trip movie.

WADE looks confused. GIDEON is looking at the walls of the elevator.

GIDEON (CONT'D)

What do you think of these mirrors? They're supposed to reduce anxiety plus give a sense of space theoretically making it feel less cramped. It's meant

to avoid feelings of being trapped. Have you heard of *the mirror rule*?

WADE

No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me.

GIDEON

You *do* know about it. Where your right hand becomes your left in the mirror.

WADE

It's not the *mirror rule*! I know this! It's actually called the *left-right inversion*. The philosopher, Stephen Law, said it was an example of a problem science could not solve. Philosophers and mathematicians, which I am one, have been debating this forever. It was decided that it might be a scientific problem, but it was a trivial one at that.

GIDEON

I can't believe you know about Stephen Law. You brought up an excellent point, though. By the way, I'm Gideon. I love my three-syllable name. . . Uh, doesn't it feel stuffy in here? Like there's no air circulating? You must be so uncomfortable. Who wears ties anymore?

WADE

My name is Wade and I'm a mathematician. I'm going to my second round of interviews for one of the big eight CPA firms.

A strange sound is heard.

GIDEON

Hey, what's with the elevator? It stopped at every other floor, but both of our floors were lit up and it didn't stop. This is crazy! What is the world trying to tell us?

GIDEON looks nauseous and crumples to the elevator floor. Wade looks in the callbox for a phone but there isn't one.

WADE

Gideon, just calm down, okay? If you faint you might hurt yourself.

GIDEON

We're trapped! Why isn't the alarm working?

WADE

Look, someone is going to know we're in here.

GIDEON

You don't know that! You saw how many elevators there were on the first floor.

The elevator suddenly stops, and Wade sees that it's stopped between floors, and the doors automatically open.

GIDEON (CONT'D)

Close those doors! I don't want to look at a bunch of bricks! If there's an earthquake they might crumble, and we'd be crushed. And look at the crack in the mirror. Can you imagine if the mirrors got loose and fell? We'd die from being stabbed by shards of glass.

WADE removes his tie and sports jacket and unbuttons his shirt collar. GIDEON remains on the floor. Then the lights go out.

WADE

It must be a power failure.

Lights come back on, and the elevator jerks and begins moving again.

GIDEON

Oh, God! It's moving again! At least the lights are on.

WADE is thrown to the floor and GIDEON reaches out and hugs him.

GIDEON (CONT'D)

Thank you. It feels good to hold someone. I'm glad you didn't move away. I'm kind of a touchy-feely guy. It's instinct. What about you?

WADE

Totally the opposite. I can't remember the last time someone held me, let alone a stranger.

GIDEON

I'm a harmless stranger. Honest I am! But you're sure this cuddling is okay with you?

WADE

It actually feels good. I'll tell you if I get uncomfortable.

GIDEON

Okay, the elevator is moving again, but it's so fast, and look at the elevator floor numbers; they're flickering on and off. What does it all mean? What is the cosmic question that we're expected to answer from all this! Where's the answer? Oh, God! We're going to crash.

WADE and GIDEON are caressing each other, almost about *to kiss*.

WADE AND GIDEON

We're going to crash!

Lights go out and then come up again, and the elevator suddenly stops. GIDEON has crept to the corner in the dark and is cowering there.

WADE

Oh, my God! Thank goodness we're not hurt.
Wait! Are you okay, Gideon?

WADE notices GIDEON lying at the other end of the elevator with his face down. WADE goes over to him and frantically nudges GIDEON until he starts to move.

WADE (CONT'D)

Oh, thank God! I thought you were dead! Did you hit your head?

GIDEON

I don't know what happened. Maybe I passed out.
If I did hit my head that explains why I have a headache.

WADE

But we're okay! We're okay! Statistically, we should not have made it! Actuarial tables have proven this!
But we've lived through this! We're really okay!

WADE is so relieved that GIDEON is not hurt, he grabs him and hugs him tightly. This time during the hug, GIDEON takes his hands and holds WADE's face and then they kiss.

THE END

