

## elevator music

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# elevator music

by [iamRemedy](#)

## Summary

You take a small step closer, feeling weird talking to him from a distance, and continue to stammer along. "Yeah, I'm the, uh— I called yesterday and your receptionist made an appointment for me to talk with you?"

The Once-ler's face lights up with a sort of recognition— not like he knows you, more like he knows of you. "You're that journalist, right?"

And then you suddenly remember why you're here in the first place, your lips curving down into a frown. You cross your arms over your chest and narrow your eyes at him. "You're chopping down all the trees."

You are a journalist in Thneedville, looking to interview a man named the Once-ler. Or... at least, that's what you'd told the receptionist who answered when you called the company responsible for making the famous 'thneeds'. You had never bought one for yourself, but they're impossible to avoid, considering everyone has one. You'd go into coffee shops and thneeds would be seen used as curtains, table cloths, cup warmers— you name it. Women use them as purses, hats, and scarves. Men use them for exercise and belts. Children even use them as jump ropes, nets, and many other things. So, yes, you live in a society where these colorful things are used for everything, yet don't have one for yourself. But that's not what this story is about.

No, you aren't actually a journalist. However, you seem to be the only one in Thneedville who notices the smog and that the Once-ler is chopping down the Truffula trees to make his beloved thneeds and making it hard to breathe. But you are sick and tired of watching your home fall apart and it's time to bring it to an end.

Thus, you posed as a journalist and made an appointment to speak with the man himself. You don't really get a kick out of lying, but you figured it was the only way you'd be let in, and you were relieved that they didn't do a background check on you. Your appointment was then scheduled for the next day.

A sleepless night and a cup of coffee later, you're en route to the factory for your appointment. You're wearing a nicer outfit than normal— a white dress shirt tucked into a red plaid skirt with black boots. You would've worn heels to finish off the look, but you can barely walk as it is, being the clumsy person you are.

You make your way out of town and smile to yourself at the sight of brilliant and bright Truffula trees. The further you go, however, the more stumps you begin to see and the darker the clouds get. It won't be long before all the trees are gone. You're glad you've decided to talk to the Once-ler now before things can get any worse. There's still time.

As you drive, you realize that you've never actually seen the Once-ler, in photos nor in person. You assume he'll be easy to spot and hope that someone will point you in the right direction.

At long last, you park outside of the factory and turn off your engine. You jump at the sound of a loud bang. Turning your head, you spot a large contraption spinning oh-so-many axes and chopping down multiple Truffula trees at once. It's a sickening sight, and you can see forest creatures running in terror from a distance. Yes, this definitely needs to stop.

You climb out of your vehicle and march into the factory, stopping in front of the receptionist's desk. She's a tall-haired blonde with big glasses; she holds up a finger as she talks to someone on a phone. When she hangs up, she addresses you with a large smile that makes you nervous, "Hello, how may I help you?"

You know you shouldn't feel intimidated by her, but she seems to be taller than you and you're sure that the smile she's wearing is faker than the lanyard around your neck. "I-I'm, uh, the journalist who called yesterday about the interview," you stammer, mentally cursing yourself.

She doesn't seem to notice your anxiousness, and her smile broadens somehow. "Oh! Yes, my little Oncie's expecting you," she beams. "He should be in his office. If not, just wait outside. We recently had an elevator installed. It's down the left hall. Take it up to the top floor and you'll see his office."

"Okay. Thank you, ma'am," you say, giving a shaky smile.

"Of course, sweetie! Good luck!" She waves you off, so you awkwardly wave back before turning down the left hallway.

You exhale a breath and look up towards the elevator, only to notice that there's someone inside it and it's closing fast. If you don't hurry and get in, you'll have to take the stairs, risking being late *and* really sweaty for your appointment with possibly the strongest man in Thneedville.

"You gotta be kidding me," you groan, breaking out into a sprint, waving your arm in the air to hopefully gain the attention of the person in the elevator. "Hey! Hold the door!"

The person's head goes up in surprise, but they quickly shoot their arm up and stop the door just before it shuts, allowing you to get in.

"Oh, thanks a bunch," you sigh, hands resting on your knees as the door finally closes.

"No problem," your elevator mate responds. "Going up?"

"Uh, yes, yeah," you pant, standing up straight. You fix your skirt and silently regret wearing it, then make sure your hair isn't a complete mess. You exhale again, letting your eyes close as your heart rate steadies.

So you've made it this far. Soon you'll be in the Once-ler's office and you can just kindly ask him to stop cutting down the trees. Seems easy enough, right? Right.

Suddenly, there's a loud bang and the lights go out. You feel the small space tremble and your hands fly out to brace yourself, latching onto the first thing you touch, which happens to be a complete stranger's arm. To be fair, this person is also gripping your shoulders pretty tightly.

The two of you are silent for a moment before the emergency lights activate and bathe the space in a red glow. You make eye contact with one another then quickly separate to opposite sides of the elevator.

"Um, what was that?" you speak up.

"I think the elevator's stuck," the stranger—who you discover is a tall, *tall* male with dark hair beneath a top hat and bright blue eyes—responds, eyebrows raised high.

"Oh, this is just great," you groan, burying your face in your hands. "I should've just taken the stairs. Now I'm gonna be late for my appointment. He probably won't even see me now!"

"Hold on, I'll call for help," the man across from you says, taking out a phone from inside his green suit. He presses a single button then holds it up to his ear. He sits there for a couple seconds before sighing in defeat and putting the phone away. "No signal."

You toy with the end of your skirt for a moment then look at him. "So what now?"

"I guess we wait," the man replies dismally. "My family will notice I'm gone, I'm sure."

As if on cue, a loud buzz rings into the room and a male voice speaks from the phone box. "Hello? Is anyone in there?"

Your elevator buddy moves closer to the box, so now he's really close to you. You back further into the wall, basically curling in on yourself, your face heating up when you catch a whiff of whatever cologne he's wearing. Now that you can see him up close, you decide he's definitely not a bad-looking guy. This makes your cheeks even warmer.

"Brett?" he questions.

"No, this is Chet," the male voice responds. "Is it just you in there?"

"Uh, no, there's a girl in here too." The dark-haired male looks down at you briefly, and your lips part unintentionally.

"Okay. Don't worry, little bro, we'll have you out o' there soon."

"You better..."

The dial tone goes off after a moment. The man backs away from you again, slumping against the wall. He runs a hand through his dark hair, knocking his hat to the ground, then meets your curious gaze. "So," he exhales, "I didn't quite catch your name."

"Well I didn't throw it," you quip, then laugh awkwardly at your own lame joke. The corner of his mouth quirks. You tell him your name then ask for his.

He raises an eyebrow, as if you should already know, then hums thoughtfully. "Once-ler," he says finally. "I'm the Once-ler."

Your mouth falls open in surprise and your eyes go wide. "Oh my— Mr. Once-ler, I'm sorry—I didn't realize," you stumble over your words, trying to quickly apologize, but now your mind's a swirling mess and you don't know what to say. "I was actually on my way to a meeting with you, I— wow."

Now it's his turn to look surprised. "Oh, really?"

You take a small step closer, feeling weird talking to him from a distance, and continue to stammer along. "Yeah, I'm the, uh—I called yesterday and your receptionist made an appointment for me to talk with you?"

The Once-ler's face lights up with a sort of recognition— not like he knows you, more like he knows *of* you. "You're that journalist, right?"

And then you suddenly remember why you're here in the first place, your lips curving down into a frown. You cross your arms over your chest and narrow your eyes at him. "You're chopping down all the trees."

His face instantly falls into a look of pure distaste. "Oh, come on, not this again," he groans, rolling his eyes. "I'm not doing anything illegal, okay? So if you're just here to yell at me then you can..." His voice trails off, though you know the last word is meant to be *leave*, and he looks even more distressed when he realizes that you *can't* leave.

You smirk at him despite yourself. "Hm, seems like your stuck with me, Mr. Once-ler."

Once-ler slides down to the floor, not even caring when his leg bumps your own. "This is a whole load of hogwash," he exclaims, pointing a finger at you. "You're not even a real journalist, are you?"

You take a seat opposite of him, finding amusement in his disdain. "I'm not," you admit. "But I am a real person who needs oxygen to survive, and it would seem you're trying to take that from me and all the citizens of Thneedville."

He scoffs, "You're making things up. Everyone's perfectly happy with the way things are."

"Because you're all blind!" you yell, watching as his eyes widen at your outburst. "You're so scared to change that you pretend everything's all hunky-dory when it's not. I step outside in the morning, and when I breathe in the air, it's not fresh in the least bit."

Once-ler rests his hands on his knees, now avoiding your gaze. "I-I don't know what you mean."

You scoot forward until your feet touch his and place a hand on his own, covered by a long green glove. "I know you do," you say calmly. "Deep down, you know what you're doing is bad."

He stares at the wall behind you, a faraway look in his eye. "Bad," he repeats to himself, though still loud enough for you to hear. His gaze falls to your hand still resting on his. "Am I a bad person?"

"I... I don't think you're a bad person," you say, chewing your lower lip in thought. "I think you've just made some bad choices lately."

Once-ler blinks repeatedly, so much that you have to blink too. It's as if he's had an epiphany, come to his senses. "I think you're right," he whispers. "None of this will end well. But, my family... they'll never listen to me."

Your lips part slightly. You honestly hadn't expected him to give in so easily. Then again, you also hadn't heard of him until recently, and from his 'following', you'd only really learned that he's 'hot', 'charming', and 'has a nice butt'. Which really isn't much to go by.

"Then make them listen," you boldly say, though your mouth is working faster than your mind and you're pretty sure you're out of motivational speech juice. "You're the... big boss man, right?"

Once-ler laughs for the first time, and you're certain you've never heard something so melodious. Call it cliché, but perhaps his little following was on to something.

"Uh, yeah, I guess you could call me that," he says with a bashful smile, scratching the back of his head.

Even his smile's great, you think. You mentally kick yourself for thinking like a school girl and move to lean back, to give him some space. However, the Once-ler seems to have other plans as he pulls you into a hug, squeezing you tightly. You wish you could say your heart isn't beating from your chest at this point; you're sure he can hear it.

"Thank you," he says. "You've... really enlightened me. I promise not to cut down another tree, and I won't break it this time."

You're not quite sure what he means by 'this time', but you're also not quite sure if this is even real life. The most powerful man in Thneedville is currently hugging you whilst the two of you are trapped in elevator. Things like that don't just happen to people like you.

You pull away again, and he allows you to this time. "Of course," you say, donning a content smile and warm cheeks. You lean against the wall again and let your eyes drift up to the emergency light. "I'm surprised you listened to me."

"You're, um, you're a good talker," Once-ler responds, and you barely catch him hit himself on the forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Pfft, thanks," you snicker behind your hand in an attempt to cover up your laugh.

He simply smiles across at you, all the while taking off his gloves and coat, most likely to get more comfortable. Then he pulls a bag of marshmallows out of his coat and opens it, popping one into his mouth with a delighted sigh.

Your stomach growls at the sight, and you suddenly remember what you forgot to do this morning.

Once-ler raises an eyebrow. You blush, realizing he must have heard the noise. He holds the bag out towards you. "Here, take some," he offers. "It's gonna be a while, and you sound hungry."

"Hehe, yeah," you murmur, slightly embarrassed, but you take a handful of the fluffy treat nonetheless. "Thank you."

You watch with curiosity as he scoots towards you and slides into the space at your left. He sends you another smile then sets the bag of marshmallows by your feet.

"How are you feeling right now?" he asks as you stuff your face happily.

"Pretty okay," you tell him after swallowing another marshmallow. "Definitely not as stressed as I was coming into this building. I had different scenarios planned out in my head and none of them were very good."

"Oh? Do tell," Once-ler hums, throwing a marshmallow into the air and catching it in his mouth with ease.

You hate how your eyes follow the entire action until landing on his lips, watching him absently lick the sugar off. You have to blink a bunch before you can look away. "Um, so I, uh," you stammer for a moment then finally realize what he'd said. "I just kind of expected the worst, heh. Like, maybe I'd get thrown in jail, or I wouldn't be allowed in. That kind of stuff."

"Well, technically, I should have you arrested," Once-ler muses with a smirk, making your eyes go wide. "But, uh, a pretty girl like you doesn't really belong in jail, heh."

The way his confidence falters by the end of the sentence is strangely heart-warming, and you're so distracted by the compliment that the marshmallow in your hand misses your face and instead hits your cheek. Blood rushes to your cheeks when he laughs at this; you don't even really think about it but then you throw a marshmallow at his face.

Part of you expects him to yell at you, but he simply leans back and smiles. "You know, under different circumstances, this could be nice," he says. "But, uh, n-not that this isn't nice or anything. You're great company."

"Yeah, you too." You reach for another marshmallow, endeared by his stammering and kind words.

"So... tell me about yourself."

You lean back, your shoulder pressed against his arm, make yourself comfortable, and you just talk. The minutes pass slow at first, but the more you talk with him, the faster time seems to go. You forget the situation you're in and feel as if you're talking with an old friend. It's... nice.

You find yourself leaning on his shoulder after a while, listening to him tell you his life story. You yawn and close your eyes as he hums a tune you've never heard before, most likely one he's made up. Any girl in Thneedville would give anything to be in your shoes, you realize with a hazy mind, tired and fading in and out of consciousness. You hear the Once-ler say your name and can only mumble incoherently in response.

"What would you say about becoming my assistant?" he asks you. "You're really good at stating your case, and I'm gonna need all the help I can get if I want to convince my family to stop chopping down trees."

"Mhm, sure," you mutter, not even sure what had been said.

Once-ler smiles as you drift to sleep, resting his own head atop yours. "Cool."



That's how his family found the two of you an hour later when they'd finally fixed the elevator, cuddled up and sound asleep with marshmallows littering the floor.

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**[end.]**

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