

Jayden and the Red Button

by Paula D. Rugen

“What happens if I push the red button?” Jayden asked his sister, Riley, as she followed him into the elevator. He took the Angel’s baseball cap off his head and scratched the bald patches scattered among new, curly red hair.

“It’s only for emergencies!” ten year-old Riley responded, inattentively. She glanced behind her, looking for Jake.

“But which emergencies? Mom said the CALL BUTTON is the emergency button. *This* button is *red*, and it wasn’t here yesterday when we came home from school,” continued Jayden, his curiosity working overtime. About to celebrate his sixth birthday, he was always asking questions.

Eight year-old Jake slammed the door of their apartment, book bag and jacket in hand.

“Hurry, Jake,” encouraged Riley. “We’ll be late for school!”

The red button slowly blinked on and off, illuminating the words, “PUSH ME.”

“Look at it now!” Jayden’s eyes grew wide.

“Look at what?” Jake panted, dashing into the elevator. He stared at the button.

“I dare you to push it!” Jayden whispered.

“No!” snapped Riley, pressing the first floor button. “We have to hurry! I don’t want Miss Adams to call Mother because we’re late again.”

Jake attempted to stick his arm into his coat, but, like a nail attracted to a magnet, his hand advanced toward the red button, hitting it with force.

Recoiling as if bitten by a snake, he dropped his coat and books, yelling, “Oh, no!”

The button activated a rhythmic pounding in the elevator accompanied by a rapid climb. The upward force caused the children to stagger to their knees; they collapsed on the floor.

“Help!” murmured Riley. She attempted to speak again, but the pounding increased and “pulsed” the children into an unconscious state.

As he started to waken, Jayden felt the pressure on his body lessen, and he began to float like a balloon. “Jake! Riley! Look!”

Surprised, Riley hovered three feet above the floor. Her brothers glided around her, giggling. A large window, with hazy glass, appeared on one wall, and the three maneuvered to look outside. They watched beautiful colors and unrecognizable shapes dance below.

As the elevator descended, six shoes, again, made contact with the floor, and five small buildings came into focus. After a soft landing near a cobblestone road, the elevator doors opened.

“Let’s explore!” Jayden said, darting from the elevator.

Jake followed on his heels, laughing. “This is better than a day in second grade!”

“Wait!” said Riley. “Let’s stay together.”

Riley forced herself to step into the sunlight and looked around for signs of danger. Her apprehension increased, as she became a part of this silent, unknown land. The boys hesitated on the road near the first building, and she sprinted to catch them.

“It looks deserted,” Jake said.

Jayden peeked in a window. “Where are all the people?”

“Where, are we?” Riley asked, panting.

From one of the buildings, an unusual singing reached their ears. The children ceased talking as they glanced toward the building, then at each other. The boys backed away, and hid in a nearby doorway; Riley listened, mesmerized by the song.

“Riley, come hide!” Jayden squeaked as tears welled in his eyes.

She stood spellbound by the sight and sounds of an enormous man, his arms loaded with packages. Dressed in a multi-colored robe, he stretched over 10 feet high and made his way toward her.

Unaware of the children’s presence, the giant continued his haunting song and crashed into Riley, knocking her down while dropping his packages. “Who? What?” he exclaimed, kneeling on the road.

“My name is Riley. My brothers and I got here by mistake. We need to go home so we can get to school before it begins.” Dropping her voice, she stood. “It’s Jayden’s last day of school before he goes to the hospital again, and his class has planned a party for him.”

“I’m Alphonse. Did you push the red button?”

Jayden ran to throw his arms around Riley. “Don’t blame my sister. It’s my fault.” He took a big breath and continued. “She didn’t push the button.”

Jake approached, averting his eyes. “It was my fault, too. Riley tried to get us to school.”

“Who saw the button first?” Alphonse asked.

Jake and Riley pointed to Jayden.

“I did,” he said.

Alphonse looked directly at Jayden with deep blue, penetrating eyes. “The red button is never discovered by mistake. Unconsciously your mind directed you toward the button.” Pausing to let the words sink into Jayden’s mind, Alphonse moved closer to the children.

“The red button is visible to those seeking a way to avoid a painful or scary experience in their future. It is well known as an ‘*escape* button.’ Jayden, what do you want to escape?”

“I’m tired of chemotherapy; I don’t want to stay in the hospital.” A frown vied for residence on Jayden’s face. “I wanted to push the button the minute I saw it, but I was afraid.” His chin dropped to his chest.

Alphonse patted Jayden’s arm. “The red button is not magic, and pushing it cannot keep you from going to the hospital. But I do have something to help make your days there less lonely.”

The friendly stranger poked among his packages. He retrieved a soft one, wrapped in blue paper, and handed it to Jayden.

“Open it!” Riley and Jake squealed.

Jayden tore into the paper and removed a furry, brown stuffed monkey. Alphonse put the monkey’s long arms around Jayden’s neck, fastening its Velcro hands like a necklace.

“Meet Sydney, your new friend who’ll keep you company in the hospital.”

The monkey’s head nestled at Jayden’s neck, and as he squeezed Sydney in his arms, a grin spread across Jayden’s features.

With a thud, the elevator doors opened revealing the lobby of their apartment building. It was empty save for the doorman. Jayden, Jake and Riley looked at each other, eyes questioning their surroundings.

“Was it a dream?” wondered Jake.

“It had to be,” stated Riley.

They stared at blue scraps of paper on the elevator floor.

Jayden opened his coat, revealing Sydney. “It was *no* dream!” he remarked, unable to hide his happiness.

Hearing the children’s laughter, the doorman turned. “Five minutes ‘til the school bell rings.”

Riley hurried through the lobby, the boys following close behind. Sidney bounced along attached to Jayden’s neck and held firmly in his arms.