

John on the 9th

by Carl Santoro

"Excuse me. I believe you have a little something falling from your right nostril there," he said, pointing with his pinky.

And so I met John.

He had only just entered the elevator and spotted me. Well, how could he not? I was the only passenger.

He pressed 9. I was 10.

I didn't know, of course, that he was to be my husband.

"Mommy, tell us the story of how you met daddy. Again."

I did a knee jerk response, but using my hand instead of my knee, and feebly uttered, "Oh, thank you." bowing my head down and taking a huge inhale to keep things inside.

The bell for 5 dinged as I reached into my pocketbook for a handkerchief. Fumbling frantically I heard myself mumbling forbidden expletives as my search could only come up with a yellow post-it that had scribbled on it the words, "buy kleenex." That's it. Just, buy kleenex. Nothing else.

The bell dingy for 9 sounded and a hand reached around my face dangling within its grasp a large white man's handkerchief monogrammed with a ridiculous "J" in blue. A blue "J".

"Here you go. Keep it."

I looked up and, blinking way too many times, whispered a thank you as I took it and masked off my lower face. The door opened.

"This is me. I'm John. "John on the 9th." Catch you next time. Keep your nose clean."

And he exited.

I was so astonished, I almost forgot to get off on the next floor.

But I did get out, and walking through that threshold I felt it was as if for the first time. The office appeared as a spring garden. Nice people blooming everywhere.

