



Love Rising

LOVE IN AN ELEVATOR

***"Cut the ending. Revise the script. The man of her dreams is a girl."* -Julie Anne Peters**

Consider this. Jacki Epps reapplied her red lipstick. Her long, wavy brown hair was pulled into a ponytail that lay on her back. She glanced at her pocket mirror to be sure she had worn black eyeliner instead of blue. Her father, Al, was funding the production, and he insisted black eyeliner was more professional. Jacki adjusted her earpiece and took one moment to make sure her hands weren't flapping since she had learned long ago that even the slightest bit of fidgeting could be distracting. Once Jacki was confident her look was fantastic, she stepped onto the elevator set. The cameras and the talent were waiting.

"Remember, Jacki, if the pilot doesn't work and we lose our network deal, Dad will disown us," her twin sister, Lynn, warned through her earpiece. The first part was definitely true, the second part Jacki wasn't

so sure about. After a pregnant pause, she added, "But you got this. No pressure. Think about the show, not Dad."

Jacki let out a laugh and told her, "Don't worry, everything's fine, little sister."

"No. No. No!" The production assistant was taking abuse. Catherine, the bachelorette-type of the show, screamed, "*I said* I wanted an iced Caramel Macchiato, not whatever this is!" Bachelorette-type, yes, but really no one was looking for marriage here. This show was expected to be much more like Tinder than Bumble. Just as the rear elevator doors opened so the cast could reach the set, Catherine threw the iced coffee in the PA's face.

Oh, yippee skippy, Jacki thought, *and away we go!* Nevertheless, as they began the shoot, Jacki turned it on for the cameras, and the energetic opening theme music enveloped the set. Catherine stood almost two feet away from Jacki once they got settled into the elevator.

"Welcome everyone to *Love Rising*, the only queer dating show set in an elevator, where if your dates don't floor you with greatness, you can give them the shaft. We have tonight's contestant, Catherine Knight, who's looking for, well..." Jacki announced. "Cathy, please tell us why people would want to visit your gayborhood."

Catherine had her red hair done up like a rose. Her amber eyes held a flame that threatened to burn anyone who came too close. Her arms were crossed over her formal red blouse. Her ruby heels clicked as she tapped against the floor.

"Catherine. It's Catherine, with a C," she said sternly. "I'm also an actress who starred in the *Kraken Hooker*, and yours truly was as glamorous... as the Kraken Hooker."

"I'm sure you were. Well, Catherine, what brings you to *Love Rising*?" Jacki asked. "Looking for that special woman?"

"Yes, the perfect one. I've yet to meet a woman who can even come close to meeting my standards."

Jacki raised one eyebrow and turned to the camera. "Here's how our show will go. We have four women: Tyler, Stephanie, Perry, and Jo. They'll each have their chance to win the affection of our lovely Catherine. If she likes them, she'll push the button with the up arrow," Jacki announced. "If the date doesn't go well, she'll push the button with the down arrow, and your date will get the Veruca Salt experience."

Jacki grinned and said, "Catherine, I'm proud to reveal the first contestant here to win your heart."

"JACKI!" her sister uttered curtly. Jacki kept smiling, unsure of why her sister needed to interrupt her exactly at this moment.

"What is it?" Jacki asked through her teeth.

"You're almost out of the shot. You need to stand closer to Catherine," Lynn urged.

Jacki sighed but scooted over a bit. Catherine growled upon feeling a personal space incursion. She whispered in Jacki's ear. "If you come any closer, you will regret it, you U-hauler, I know your type."

WTF! Jacki rolled her eyes. Whatever. If Catherine thought she could intimidate her, she'd have to do better.

The announcer exclaimed, "Waiting in the elevator is the adventurous Tyler!"

The front doors opened to reveal a person clad in scuba gear. Jacki blinked, wondering if the crew had played a prank on them. A form-fitting wet suit covered her from head to toe. A pair of goggles and a snorkel buried the individual's face.

She removed the goggles to reveal a gorgeous woman with waves of blonde hair and bright green eyes. Jacki was relieved when she saw Catherine perk up in fascination.

"Tyler, you look ready to face the Kraken herself," Jacki declared.

"I swim with my mates, the octopuses, whales, and even the occasional box jellyfish. Crikey, I'm a vagitarian from down under — Catherine, I hope you'll visit me there some time! Jacki, I can definitely tame the Kraken."

Catherine, who entered the elevator to be with Tyler, was entranced by her confidence, golden hair, and the playful lilt of her accent. An intrigued smirk bloomed on Catherine's face.

As the date was moving in the right direction, Catherine initiated the elevator's ascent. The elevator rose as Tyler mesmerized Catherine with tales of her adventures, including a cliff-diving experience where she encountered numerous venomous serpents.

By the end of the speed date, the elevator returned to its original floor, where Jacki was waiting. Catherine pressed the top button, indicating she was considering Tyler. The scuba diver exited through the rear doors, cheering, while Catherine exited through the front to join Jacki.

"Well, that was Tyler for you," Jacki proclaimed. "Quite the sapphic explorer."

The announcer exclaimed, "Waiting in the hardware department is Stephanie!" A put-together woman in a conservative yet sexy dress stumbled out of the elevator from the rear doors.

"Stephanie," Jacki said. "Let's see how you get on with Catherine."

Based on her stylistic approach, Catherine immediately pegged her as a femme, but noticed something was off.

"Thank you, thank you all," the woman said in a saccharine voice as she waved, somewhat confused, to no one in particular. "I am a successful real estate agent, and I want to take my man to my penthouse of passion."

Jacki kept a straight face, despite wanting to burst out in chuckles. She and Lynn had decided to throw in a wild card. They didn't tell Stephanie everything about the new dating show. Lynn wasn't completely sold on misleading Stephanie, but their father pushed the idea, and he was in charge. Jacki also knew Stephanie wouldn't object. In her interviews, she had said she just wanted to be on TV and post on her Insta. For her, those were the *right reasons*.

Anyway, looking in Catherine's general direction, she inquired, "Hey Jacki, who's this?" Catherine responded by staring daggers at her and then gave Jacki the hairy eyeball. Catherine clearly was not taking the wild card well and didn't even bother to enter the elevator.

"No! You're shafted." She flicked her hair at Stephanie and turned her back. Catherine pushed the down button, signaling her immediate rejection.

Jacki pushed her lips into a sly smile.

"Bye-bye, you can go now," Catherine added. The elevator doors closed.

A bewildered Stephanie shook her head and shrugged as the next contestant, Perry, fixated on her phone, bumped into her on her way to the elevator set.

Catherine frowned and shook her head. She had more than enough experiences with straight women to last a lifetime.

"Okay," Jacki laughed. "But what can you do? I wish Stephanie the best of luck on her journey."

The announcer exclaimed, "Coming from the Children's-Ware Department is Perry, an influencer, known for modeling clothes for Kavannah's and is sponsored by Coral's Crystal Cakes."

The front elevator doors opened to show a young woman, Perry, all dolled up in the trendiest clothes Jacki had ever seen. She wore a flowery romper and her sparkly eyeshadow nearly overwhelmed her face. Her black hair was wrapped in a beautiful braid around her crown.

Catherine stared. Some sparkle returned to her eyes. Her hand hovered over the up arrow as she entered the elevator for a promising date.

But Perry's eyes were glued to her phone, her lightning-manicured fingers updating her followers. Jacki urgently had to bring her attention back to the show and, of course, to Catherine, who was *right there!*

Perry glared at Jacki's interruption before realizing the date had begun. She blushed in embarrassment.

The woman got a glimpse of Catherine and sighed in delight, then frustration.

"I'm sorry. Sponsor emergency. Big trouble, gotta go!"

And go Perry did, right through the rear doors. Perry had seemed promising. Catherine stood still for a moment, stunned. Through no fault of her own, she was experiencing strange emotions, feeling rejected and alone. Her eyes turned red as she clenched her fists, spamming the down button.

“What kind of fucking show is this?” she howled as she exited through the front doors. Lynn bleeped Catherine but kind of agreed with her.

Jacki thought about comforting her, though she didn’t trust Catherine not to make good on her earlier violent threat. Jo, seeing the encounter on the monitor, approached the rear doors of the elevator with confidence.

The announcer declared, “Waiting in the Women’s Lingerie department is...Jo.”

The elevator doors opened to reveal Jacki’s dream celesbian standing before her. Jacki had been obsessed with Jo since she first saw her TV show and listened to her companion podcast, *Field of Love and Teddy Bears*. The host flushed, taking in Jo’s dark brown skin, black vegan leather Brando jacket, and short pixie-cut black hair. Jacki’s heart stopped, and she gulped. Jo’s trans activism practically set Jacki on fire. She wished she could have met her backstage before the show, but there hadn’t been time.

Jo stood firm inside the elevator as if she had already won.

“Um, Jo, it is an honor to have you on the show,” Jacki stammered. “What can you tell Catherine to seal the deal?”

Jo responded, “I’m a trans woman, my pronouns are she/her, and I’m an Aquarius. I’ve spent my life advocating for our rights through my media

ventures. It's been hard going at it alone — until now." She winked at Catherine.

Catherine ignored the wink. She was frustrated, confused, and unsure of what was happening after the scuba gear, a straight woman, and now *...this*.

"Cathy, I see you're the lucky girl. Well, if you're up for a ride on my crotch rocket, I'm ready to rev your engine."

Catherine responded curtly, "I don't think so. I don't like dirt or insects or... short hair. And my name is Catherine."

Jacki saw an opportunity. Even though she knew from TikTok that Jo's crotch rocket was a Ducati Panigale V4, Jacki couldn't help but ask.

"You — you have a motorcycle?"

Jo turned to Jacki. "Yes, I do, angel. She's called The Beast."

Jacki's face turned as vermillion as the red devil.

"Jacki," Lynn scolded in a whisper. "No flirting, please. Remember our agreement with the sponsors and with Dad."

Jacki froze, not appreciating the cliterference. She remembered the long scolding Dad had given her. She decided she'd stay as professional as possible and noticed Catherine rejecting Jo.

Catherine stamped her foot and pouted. "Not going to happen." She snorted and pushed the down button.

"Well, that was Jo for you. An intriguing, beautiful woman who will *not* be Catherine's next date," Jacki concluded. "That means Tyler and

Catherine are free to drive off in a Subaru or fly off into the heavens or whatever!"

As Tyler came out of the Green Room to hug Catherine, Catherine was relieved that the nightmare production was over.

Jacki felt a weight had been taken off her when the cameras stopped rolling and the end theme music played. She passed through the rear elevator doors, which led to craft services, and met up with Lynn.

Lynn's face had relaxed. She was waiting to give her older sister a big hug. Whatever hiccups there were with the pilot would be sorted out. As Lynn approached Jacki, she was stopped in her tracks by Jo. Jacki's dream girl walked confidently and with purpose toward Jacki. Jo looked right through Lynn and focused on her mesmerized twin.

Jacki, just as engrossed and turned on as Jo, smiled and said, "Shall we pick up where we left off?" Before Jo could say anything, the two ran out of the building holding hands, focused on being anywhere but the set.

Jacki held tightly onto Jo's leather jacket as her motorcycle took them into their future. A future without cameras, elevators, or black eyeliner, as Jo also preferred Jacki to match the blue of her eyes. If there was a sunset outside, then Jacki and Jo rode off into it, to find their happily ever after together.



See the end of the book for elevator etiquette rules followed or broken.
Elevator Etiquette Codes: 2A, 2D, 2F, 4A, 5A, 5D, 6H