

Keypad

The keypad outside the apartment building responded to the man's touch by emitting a bright blue backlight. It pissed him off.

When he'd first touched the keypad seven failed door code attempts ago, he'd found the light friendly and encouraging. But seven failed attempts at something often does serious damage to your wellbeing. And this man didn't exactly have a healthy wellbeing to begin with. After the sixth failure, he'd gone down the block to the little park and sat in the light rain on a damp bench. *Great*, he'd thought to himself, *now my ass is going to be wet all evening*. But he'd stayed there for a few minutes, looking down at the black screen of his dead phone and pretending to be someone who lived around there. Eventually he'd come back from the park and failed the door code again.

Where the man came from, locked doors gave a little when you pushed on them, opening a slim fraction until they contacted the bolt, but this stubborn door refused him even that pleasure. It really pissed him off.

"Do you need something?" asked the immigrant woman hiding from the rain in the neighboring doorway.

"No," the man replied.

Peering around the corner of her shelter, the woman watched him fail the door code an eighth time.

"Do live there?" she asked from behind her accent and cigarette smoke.

"No."

"Oh," she replied, looking the man over. Her look told the man that she thought he was a drug dealer.

He took out his dead phone and pretended to call someone and then pretended that the person he was calling hadn't picked up. He returned the phone to his pocket.

"What do you got?" the woman asked.

"What?" he asked, genuinely confused.

"What do you got?" she repeated in a meaningful tone.

"Cancer," he replied sarcastically.

The woman's mouth froze in the process of prodding him further. She brought a cigarette to her lips, but stopped herself before taking a drag and threw it to the pavement.

"Sorry," she said. Then the man's tone caught up to her. "Do you really got cancer?" she asked skeptically.

"No."

"Asshole!"

The man ignored her and turned his attention back to the keypad. One of the buttons had an image of a key on it. He tried incorporating that key in a few more attempts, but nothing came of the effort.

His friend had told him the code was *1945*. His friend and his friend's wife had invited him to dinner. *Nineteen-fucking-*

forty-five, he thought in someone else's voice, *the year they let me leave that shithole beach on Tinatonga and see Peggy, and to see our baby girl for the first time. O, sweet Betty-Lee, your little nose, your pink little nose...*

"I gotta say," the woman interrupted, "you're making me uncomfortable."

I drink six beers on the porch watching the sun come up, so I can go back in and start the day with bedheaded Peggy and crusty-eyed sweet Betty-Lee, not thinking about nineteen-fucking-forty-three or nineteen-fucking-forty-four or the first half of nineteen-fucking-forty-five. Nineteen-fucking-forty-five... No man's ever seen more rotten coconuts than me. Rotten coconuts or rotten Jap heads, couldn't tell the difference in nineteen-fucking-forty-five. The man typed it out on the keypad to no avail, then he mimed taking the last sip from an imaginary beer can and dashing it against the pavement.

"I said you're making me uncomfortable!" she yelled. "You gotta get out of here."

She'd come out from her doorway into his and put her righteous anger right up against his face. The orange light above the door accented her smoker's creases. The man backed up out into the rain.

"Hey," he said.

"You gotta get out of here!"

"I'm just trying to meet a friend."

"What're selling? Pot?" she shrieked. "We got a zero tolerance policy around here. Read the signs, asshole."

"Pot?" the man asked quizzically.

She held her arms out to either side, taking up the whole doorway and obscuring the keypad. In a fit of martyrly enthusiasm, she was prepared to sacrifice herself to prevent the man from trying to enter the innocent building.

"You gotta get your pot-fiend asshole outta here!" she screamed.

"Hey, look lady," the man replied without feeling, "my friend lives in there, and he's invited me to dinner. And his wife."

The woman, mollified slightly by his tone, changed tack.

"What's your friend's name?" she asked critically.

"Ashton"

"I don't know an Ashton living here."

"Why would you?"

"Because I live here," the woman yelled, getting riled up once again. "And I would know!"

"Why were you smoking in that doorway, then?" the man asked, pointing to the woman's previous shelter.

"That's none of your goddamn business!"

"His last name is Heavy."

"There isn't a Heavy living here. You gotta get outta here!"

"Hey, he lives here," the man protested half-heartedly.

"You see his name on the fucking buzzers?"

"You think I'd still be here if I did?" the man retorted.

Before the woman could return fire with her catchphrase, the neighboring door swung open, and a young woman in an floral apron came out cooing “Fiji” softly into the night. It was Ashton Heavy’s wife. *What was her name, again?*

“Oh, hey!” the man greeted her.

He’d been at the wrong door the whole time. *Nineteen-fucking-forty-five! Now that I think of it, the last time I came here the keypad hadn’t lit up all obnoxious blue.*

“Clyde!” she cried in happy surprise and gave him a hug. “That’s good timing.”

“Yeah, I was just walking up,” lied the man named Clyde. He glanced back at the woman who stood frozen in her martyr pose in the doorway, absorbing the new information. She didn’t appear ready to contradict him.

“Did you see a cat jump out of a window?” the wife asked. “Her name’s Fiji.”

“You have a cat?” Clyde asked.

“The landlord left us with his cat for the week. It just jumped out of the window.”

“Well, that’s not good,” Clyde replied.

“Fiji,” the wife cooed again. She turned to the woman in the doorway, “Did you see a cat jump out of a window?”

The woman shook her head slowly without saying a word.

“Fiji!” Clyde shouted out into the dark street. Relief had improved his mood—or it was his mood—and he was going to have dinner after all. And the seat of his pants wasn’t as wet as he’d thought it’d been.

“Fiji,” the wife cooed, going down the block to the park.

Clyde turned to the woman in the doorway and said, “Sorry for the confusion.”

“You gotta watch yourself,” the woman replied with anger still lingering on the edge of her voice.

“I’m sorry,” he said helplessly.

The woman didn’t reply and turned to the door. She typed the door code into the keypad, obscuring the buttons with her left hand so that Clyde only saw a bright blue glow between her fingers. The keypad issued a buzz and the woman disappeared into the building without a word.

Clyde was alone in the light rain, the city muffled and fresh. *Maria*, he remembered. *The wife’s name is Maria. Maria Heavy.* Clyde trotted down the glittering pavement toward the park. He was going to help Maria find her landlord’s cat.

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