

the IT guy

Iggy's apartment had exactly one pair of slippers, one chair at the kitchen table, and one empty cup of black tea. He had painted the cabinets in his kitchen gray to match the scuffs on the tile and the eggshell white paint on the walls. His lamps fixed his apartment with a harsh, white glow because it was brighter than the soft yellow tones he grew up with.

Iggy's car had exactly two seats: one for the passenger and one for the driver, although he didn't need that many. The only passenger Iggy ever had was his work bag, which was stuffed with a laptop, power cables, USB cords, and battery packs. It rode with him to work, wherever work was that day.

Iggy looked to his phone for his updated schedule. The company he worked for, ITguys, changed his schedule over the weekend to accommodate their new client, Sole Savers. Sole Savers, Iggy read last night, was a company that designed comfortable shoe inserts, and five cents of every dollar was donated to the Prisoner Reform Project. What they had left out on their website however, was that unpaid inmates made up 40% of their labor force. It wasn't apart of Iggy's job to do that additional research, but he liked to know what kind of people he was going to deal with. Iggy arrived within 30 minutes and expected an easy day. New clients don't usually demand very much IT support on the first visit.

He pulled into the parking lot of an old building downtown, kept his parking ticket with him for reimbursement, and walked into the lobby. "Sole Savers: 6th floor," he read. The building was unusually quiet for a Monday morning at 9am. He had been to

several buildings just like this before. Some bustled with people at all hours of the day. Some had repair work being done and the employees have to avoid certain spaces. And some had peak hours, where you only see people at lunch and closing time, and it becomes so congested in the halls that you could count the beads of sweat on the neck of the person in front of you.

The elevator in this building was rather old. It was the same kind as the apartment he used to share with his ex boyfriend, Bryce. There were two sets of doors: the one on a hinge you had to swing open like any old door, and the metal elevator door that slid open to let you in or shut you out. His lift came and the first door unlocked itself as the elevator door opened for him. Faint bossa nova music filled the small space. It wasn't anything like the elevators in the buildings his other clients were in. Most of those elevators could fit upwards of 20 people if you didn't mind strangers' breath in your ear, but Iggy looked around and figured that you could fit maybe half that amount. He looked up to see a ceiling coated in mirrors, and a small brass chandelier with crystals hanging from the arms and crown; the light bulbs were clumsily shaped like flames. The rails along the sides shone brightly, like they were just polished not too long ago. He grew confident that this elevator was well taken care of, if not just old fashioned.

Iggy practiced a straight-lipped smile as he watched the dial above the door point to the floors he was climbing. The chandelier swung gently from side to side with each passing floor, and a hidden bell rang each time the dial pointed at a new number. Floor 2...*ding*, Floor 3...*ding*, Floor 4...*ding*. Floor 5: *Ding. Ding. Ding Ding Ding Ding Ding.*

Iggy looked to the dial to see it jumping back and forth wildly between 5 and 6. The floor violently vibrated, and he looked up to see the chandelier crash wildly against the mirrored ceiling. It jumped up with every jerk of the lift and left scratches against the mirrors. Then, the bell stopped. The shaking stopped. The chandelier still swung, but the swoops faded away until, at last, it was still.

That must have been upwards of 5 minutes, Iggy thought. He checked his watch to find only a few seconds had passed. He glanced up at the dial above the door: it sat perfectly between 5 and 6. “Well...fuck me,” he mumbled to himself as he walked over to press the door open button. Nothing happened. He took a deep breath and reached to open the call box, wondering how fast rescuers would be able to pry him out of this ancient elevator, and how long this old thing could stay suspended. Iggy brushed his wispy black hair from his shallow eyes and reached for the call box. Out clamored several carelessly crushed beer cans, announcing their freedom to the world. Some full cans rolled out behind them and dropped with a thud to the carpeted floor. Iggy could have sworn for a moment that the lift dropped just a little bit, but when he looked at the chandelier it was perfectly still. He turned back to the call box to find that it was completely void of any phone: Someone had ripped it out to make room for their beer.

“Well FUCK!” Iggy screamed, swiftly turning around and kicking the side of the elevator. His face glowed brightly red. The kick didn’t hurt the side paneling of the walls, but pain shot up his foot and he doubled over. Iggy was convinced it broke his big toe. His mouth filled up with swear words until there was no more room to hold them, and he spilled them into the room, drowning out the droning elevator music.

“Hello?” A woman’s voice said. Iggy stopped screaming. “Hello? Is there someone in there?” A squeaky, high pitched Australian accent came from above him.

“Hi! Hello! Yes, I’m in here! I’m stuck inside of this elevator!”

“Oh yeah, that happens sometimes,” she called back casually. A few moments of silence passed as Iggy waited for her to offer some sort of help. The silence continued, and fearing she would walk away, he shouted back to her.

“Well...can you call for help? There’s nothing but beer in the call box down here.”

“Oh yeah, that’s Josephine’s, from research and development. She’s had a really rough year.” Iggy didn’t say anything, trying to figure out why this woman would think that mattered to him. “Her husband left her,” the woman continued. “He left her right after their son was diagnosed with tourettes. She said he left because he’s an asshole, but I think it’s just because he didn’t know how to deal with it.” Iggy put his head in his hands and rubbed his eye until they were bloodshot. “Not that it makes it okay. I’m just saying I don’t think she’s even trying to see his point of view.”

“You don’t say,” Iggy shouted back with his head still in his hands. “Well I’m sorry to hear that, but do you think you could maybe call for some help since Josephine has ripped out the only telephone?” She was silent for another moment. Iggy started to worry that this air headed woman had already wandered off to continue her day. He reached into his pocket for his phone, and with no surprise he gazed at the grayed out bars. *Of course there is no service. Why on earth would there be service here in the 1960s elevator from Hell that’s filled with beer?*

“I can do that, no problem,” she said. “I just have some things to fax first. I’ll get in real big trouble if these don’t get out by 10. Do you think you could wait a moment?”

“Sure!” He shouted. “I’m not going anywhere,” he added under his breath. Iggy hobbled to the corner farthest from the callbox and the pile of beer cans and sat against the wall. He reached into his work bag and pulled out his laptop. Although there was no signal nor internet, he didn’t need it to start working. *The faster I can get this done, he thought, the faster I can get out of this place and tell Samar I’m never coming back to this client.* Iggy’s blood was still rushing through him from the conversation with the woman on the 6th floor. She was one of the employees from Sole Savers, and in that brief moment with her, his chosen lifestyle of solitude settled in his brain as the only reasonable, logical choice. How was he expected to have the energy to troubleshoot computers and learn the cello when he was forced to interact with exhausting people like this?

He opened his laptop, put on Jacqueline du Pre’s cello concerto, and pulled up the client information. “Sole Savers: Making the world more comfortable, and encouraging people to put themselves into other people’s shoes,” read the top of his document. Iggy rolled his eyes and sighed. *A company that helps reform inmates but uses them as slave labor. I can’t really see the charity here.*

Iggy pulled a list of the the employees’ logins and passwords on his computer. He shifted through them, marking the dangerously stupid ones to report to Sole Saver’s manager. ITguys couldn’t make the employees change their passwords, no matter how unsafe they were, but it was their policy to report them.

Username: JosephineE001

Password: FuckGeorge2003

This makes sense, Iggy smiled to himself as he scrolled past it. There was something strangely satisfying about the simplicity and straightforwardness of her password. *And*, he thought, *it must be easy to remember when you are a little buzzed*.

Username: GaryS391

Password: PaSsWoRd

Again, Iggy scrolled past it. He knew it was a bad password, but thought that anybody who used alternating capital letters deserved a security breach. He felt no guilt.

Username: ShawnaT59

Password: 39SimplyCATS4ever!

This must be the woman I talked to. It sounds like it would be her: an overexcited, over enthusiastic crazy cat lady. Iggy marked the line. The password was secure. It had capital letters, numbers, and an exclamation mark. It was, by far, the best password on the list yet, but his blood started to boil more and more as he looked at it and thought about how he was still on the floor of an elevator while this woman, this Shawna, made a fax. “Shows poor judgement,” he typed into the comments bar.

“Hello, down there! Are you still alright?” Shawna’s voice had come back in the same, squeaky tone.

“Just fine,” he said.

“Sorry it took so long. We had a problem with the fax machine, but we thought it was on our side, so we had to take the whole darn thing apart, can you believe that?”

But once we put it back together and it still wasn't working, we called the people we were sending it to and it turns out the problem was on *their* end! What craziness. If only we had called them first we could have saved us a whole bunch of time, and also I wouldn't have cut my finger against a sharp corner of the inside of the fax machine. But it was okay because we buy the fun band aids here, the kind with superheroes on them. I mean, I'm not much into superheroes, but some days you just need that extra boost of confidence, don't you know?"

Iggy was biting onto his fist, his eyes shut tight and his face growing red again as he took a deep breath. "That's real great about the bandages," he shouted up to her, trying desperately to maintain his professionalism. Samar warned him about his temper already this month, and another complaint would ensure that Iggy couldn't demand his removal from this client. "How about calling the firemen now? Or the repairman? Or whoever deals with this kind of thing."

"Oh right, yes I did that already," she shouted back down.

"Oh you did?" The upbeat tone in Iggy's voice surprised him. "When will they be here?"

"Well it turns out that there's actually a pretty big fire downtown. The news says it was likely electrical, but it's a brand new building so I think it's more likely a disgruntled employee. Anyway, they're sending out someone, but it might be a while. Most of their people are trying to save houses and lives right now."

Iggy's eyes rolled so far back he thought he could see his brain, which was pulsing and beating up against his skull. It was silent for a few more moments.

“But I talked to Josephine, on the hush hush, of course. She said you could have some of that beer if you want, and you can just pay her back when you get out of the lift. She’s awfully nice that way, you know.”

Iggy’s muscles in his shoulders and neck stiffened. Every syllable from her mouth made his eyesight a little more blurred with white. How much more of that cheery voice could he take? “Yup,” he shouted back in a quick burst of breath. He was worried if he continued to speak that only swear words would come out.

“Alright then, I need to get back to my duties, but I’ll come in and check up on you every so often. It must get lonely being all by yourself.”

Iggy chose not to say anything else and after a few minutes of silence he stared at the floor under the call box where the extra cans of beer lay. When he was sure she had walked away, he reached over and cracked one open. *Fuck it*, he thought. He pounded the first one and opened another. It didn’t even matter that it was cheap and tasted like room-temperature piss—it quickly became the best part of his day. Soon after, his legs began to feel lighter and his previous thought didn’t exist: only what he was thinking at that moment was real. He didn’t know how long he had been sitting there, tipsy and suddenly needing to pee, but slowly he began to cry. It wasn’t a sob, the kind where you moan or grab your hair. It was gentle, and the only evidence at all were the tears themselves. There was no heavy breathing, no runny nose, and no aching heart. Only thick and heavy tear drops. Iggy sat there against the wall trying to figure out what exactly had triggered it. Was it being trapped in a small space? Was it what Shawna had said about being alone? “I always knew I didn’t talk to many

people...and I don't really mind that. Though it would be nice to have someone to talk to over breakfast or dinner. And I do miss the way mom would play Jaqueline du Pre for me when I was sick..." He smelled the chicken soup and tasted the Sprite as he recalled Jacqueline du Pre's cassette tape in the stereo on sick days. None of these things made him get better any quicker, but it made his stay in bed more comfortable.

His phone had no internet, but it still had battery. He unlocked it and went into his photo gallery. There weren't many pictures of his mother. He wasn't the type to take pictures, and only did so on holidays at her request, and when he realized that there would be no more chances. He gazed at one of her, laying in her maroon recliner where the fabric was worn and rough. Her face was gaunt and her hair thin, and the oxygen tank peered out from behind her chair. In full view was her cello in the corner thickly layered with dust. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the sound of her music drift through the house when she thought it was empty, when he had come home from school and she didn't hear the door close behind him.

Iggy refocused on his spreadsheet. His eyes were blurry from the tears and the drink. He wiped away what water he could and continued to sort through the employees' passwords.

Username: RoryL22

Password: Jacqueline22dupre22

He sat there, stunned. *Rory...how did you know?* His eyes had only remained dry for a moment before swelling with tears again as he stared at this name, and thoughts about this Rory person flooded his brain. Was Rory tall or short? How did he dress? Did he

find himself at symphonies often, or did he prefer to play? *I bet*, he thought, *Rory dresses in nice suits, gray with colorful bowties. He sounds like the kind of guy who wears big, thick black glasses and keeps a clean shave. And I bet he plays. He's a thin guy who plays a fat cello, imitating Yo-Yo Ma while he sits in his apartment that overlooks the city...No, the countryside. And he too lost his mom in the last year, I bet. That's where he learned the cello from, and if not his mom then his dad. It was a tight knit family, the kind who eats around the table.*

Iggy looked at his shoes and noticed how scuffed and worn they were. They were starting to fray around the toes, and when he pushed against the sole with his good foot, the bit of rubber would separate from the leather. *I need someone to save my sole now*, Iggy giggled to himself. *And I can't go up there looking like this, with these shoes. Rory will notice right away.* Another quiet drop fell from Iggy's eye, and he started to inspect the rest of his outfit. His pant legs sat a good two inches above his ankle, his collar had coffee stains on it and a weird crust that he had noticed before. He stared up to the ceiling to see the still chandelier and his reflection. It was the first time in months that he had really looked at himself. Were his eyes always that small? How long had that zit been growing on his chin (and what 32 year old man still gets zits)? Why did he look so milky white in a soft yellow light, and what did he look like under the violent white industrial lights hanging in his apartment?

When I get out, I'll take the stairs back down. I can't stay here. Not right now, and not today. With this exit plan in mind, his thoughts drifted back to Rory. "Why does

he stick with me like this? Is it because I haven't met another person who even knows who Jacqueline du Pre is?"

It's because you miss your mom, a different part of his brain chimed in.

"Shhhhh," he whispered.

His mouth was feeling uncomfortably dry. Iggy moved his lips around, trying to build up his spit, but gave up and remembered his work.

Username: SongL26

Password: 123456

A drunk Iggy scrolled past it.

Username: BrettC10

Password: football

A drunk Iggy scrolled past it.

Username: AllenR004

Password: RAllen400

A drunk Iggy scrolled up back to Rory. *I bet when you came out to your parents they just hugged you.*

Your mom stopped hugging you, the other part of his brain said.

"But at least mom kept talking to me..."

"Hello down there!" Shawna's shrill voice pierced through both the metal and his brain. He glanced at his watch, and somehow an hour and a half had passed. "The firemen are here and they say it's a simple fix. They'll have you out within the half hour, they say."

Iggy took a minute to compose himself. He concentrated very hard on his voice: it couldn't be shaky and unsure, and it couldn't be aggressive either. *I don't want them to know that I've cried, or that I'm a little drunk, and they shouldn't know that I'm trying not to sound like those things.* "OKAY!" he screamed at Shawna, his voice cracking at the end.

"Very good then! And since I have you here, 'it' guy, my computer froze, but I can move my mouse, but can't click on anything. How can I fix that?"

"HAVE YOU TRIED TURNING IT OFF AND THEN TURNING IT ON AGAIN?" *Did I just scream that?* A burp rolled up his throat and filled his mouth with the taste of cheap beer again.

"Well no, but there's no need to yell, now is there?" It was silent again, but only for a few minutes.

"Ok that worked, but now it's asking me if I want to restart using defaults," she said. "What does that mean?"

"PRESS F1 ON THE KEYBOARD."

"My, again with the yelling. But thank you. You seem to know what you're doing even from all the way down there. That's the mark of a real 'it' guy, isn't it?" she giggled.

Iggy paused his music and sat in silence. Shawana was silent, his thoughts were silent, and the room was silent (the elevator music seemed to have stopped sometime ago without Iggy noticing). It was only once the floor started to rumble, and the empty beer cans knocked against each other, and the chandeliers crystals swung that Iggy

jumped back into the world and looked at his watch. 1pm. The firemen did their jobs as they said they would, and the needle of the elevator dial pointed to Floor 6. The firemen opened the door. They glanced at the pile of beer cans on the floor, and then back at Iggy. He felt their raised eyebrows and judgemental looks. He could have outed Josephine, but figured his alcohol breath probably damaged his credibility. *Besides, Josephine was right. Fuck George. He did sound like an asshole.*

He stepped out of the lift with his bag, walked past the firemen, and took in a breath of fresh air--something he hadn't noticed he had been missing until right then. The air conditioner's cool breeze blew against his skin and at his ankles, where his pant legs didn't quite cover, and the pain in his broken big toe started to come back quickly. In front of him stood a woman with brown hair down to her hips and straight bangs across her eyebrows. She was no taller than 5 feet, and rather round. She spoke with the same Australian accent as the woman who had talked to him in the elevator. "Good to have you out then. Glad to see you're okay."

Her squeaky voice still made his chest tighten like a heart attack would, but he knew it was because of her that he was out. "Thank you for everything, Shawna," he said politely.

Her face twisted, her eyebrows scrunched together, and her mouth grew small. "Shawna? Did someone come around here and say I was Shawna?"

"Well, no..." Iggy realized that he hadn't actually asked for her name. He had just assumed.

“No bother then. I don’t know why you’d think I’m Shawna--she’s actually out today with the flu poor thing, though to be honest with you I saw her yesterday and she had that pregnancy glow so I suspect she’s misdiagnosing herself. Won’t that be something when she comes to us in 2 months and announces, and then I can think to myself ‘I knew it!’, though I’d never say that to her face, mind you. But anyways, no, I’m not Shawna. They call me Rory Lowder round these parts. They call me Rory in all parts actually.” Rory smiled and extended her fleshy hand, and Iggy’s face fell as he shook it, his grip as firm as a wilted flower. He scanned the offices, looking for the tall thin man he invented in his mind and realized that he was truly fiction.

Iggy didn’t say anything else. He just nodded to Rory, saluted the firemen as one would do to the military, and limped towards the staircase with his broken toe.

“Wait now, isn’t he supposed to be here till 4?” Rory asked one of the firemen, who just shrugged. “Well of course you wouldn’t know, now would you? Say...I wonder if you know how to get my mouse to work for my computer again. When I shut it down, I seem to have disconnected it.”

Rory’s voice faded as Iggy made his way down the stairwell, but the memory of her stayed with him all along the journey back home and into his apartment. He turned on the sterile lights in his bathroom. He was pale and the circles under his eyes were dark. Rory’s squeaky Australian accent still echoed in his ears about whatever nonsense he had to listen to in the elevator, and he smiled. *It was nice to have a friend today*, he thought.