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Your Number's Up

by Sho Botham

“Hello, it’s me. How’s my favourite bad boy? You gorgeous thing you. Hello, it’s me, are you there?”

“Erm, hello. I think you must have the wrong number.”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry. Oh, I feel very foolish. Sorry, I’m very...”

“No not at all. Your wonderfully cheery voice, has made an old man’s day. Thank you. thank you.”

“Hello, is that you, Mo? it’s me. You’ll never guess what just happened.”

Ernie told his next door neighbour all about the wonderful cheery voice on the end of the phone. Mel Brooster could see how Ernie’s chance encounter with a stranger had perked him up no end. It made her realise how quiet he had become lately and how few visitors he had. She made a mental note to pop into see him on a regular basis. With work and a busy social life, she didn’t have a lot of spare time but Ernie had been good to her three years ago when she moved in. She felt it was her turn to help him.

“I know, can you imagine what the old boy would have thought if I’d said what I usually say when I phone you? He might have had a heart attack.”

“Maybe, hon, you should dial the wrong number again. You could be his phone angel. You could get him going with a bit of phone sex, grinned Mo with a sarcastic gleam in his eye.”

“Don’t be silly,” said Layla. “I’m not sure what I dialled wrong anyway. Once I get my new phone my contacts will be in it so I won’t need to physically dial your number. You’re lucky I already had a note of it before I dropped my phone down the loo. He sounded nice on the phone. Maybe I could try and see if I can call him again. He’s obviously lonely.”

“Is it arriving tomorrow?”

“What, my phone? Yes, it should be. The new features are great and the cameras, they’re unbelievable. It was almost worth dropping my phone down the loo just to get it upgraded.”

Mel Brooster sat in her uniform at the front desk of the local police station in Oslo Street. Several coppers were milling around. Gen Malvey was saying goodbye to his colleagues after five years at Oslo Street. He was moving 50 miles away to a smaller, quieter station. Both he and his wife fancied village life and to be able to send their four year-old daughter to a small village school.

Ernie was delighted to hear Layla’s cheery voice again at the other end of the phone. When he discovered that she lived nearby he invited her round for a cup of tea. Mo couldn’t believe his luck. His girlfriend had the old man’s address and an invitation for tea. His mind was racing ahead seeing an opportunity – he wouldn’t even have to break-in.

Police cars with their blue flashing lights blocked the road. The outline of Ernie’s lifeless body looked small underneath the dark blanket, as he was wheeled towards the ambulance. His neighbour, Mel had just got back from work. She was still in her police uniform. She couldn’t believe that Ernie was dead, murdered. He had been so full of life only a few days ago when he told her about the wrong number, phone call.

Gen Malvey and his family had settled into village life quickly. He enjoyed the quieter police station and community focus of his police work. All of this changed one Monday when old Albert in Main Street was found dead by his distraught carer. Gen read his colleague’s report and his eyebrows raised. He’d seen something like this before. A wrong number phone call followed by a visit from a woman old Albert didn’t know. Someone reported seeing a man going into old Albert’s, that was different, Gen didn’t recall there being a man involved before.

“I know why this is familiar – Ernie was killed after a wrong phone call and visit from a woman. Back at my old station. I’m sure of it. Let me see if I can get the report.” Gen put his mobile phone to his ear.

“Thanks mate, I thought so. I don’t suppose they would expect a copper from Oslo Street who dealt with Ernie’s murder to now be stationed in a quiet village 50 miles away. They might have thought it was far enough not to be noticed, not to be linked. But they won’t get away with murder twice.