

Closure Not Guaranteed

"Hey sweetheart, first time? Go ahead and take a number. Can you just sign here and here for me and show me a photo ID?"

A receptionist slips a pink waiver onto the counter and slides a pen in my direction.

I read.

The person you wish to reach can be best contacted with the last phone number that you knew them to have. Make sure to dial 9 before the recipient's number, including area code. You have five minutes once your recipient answers the phone. Once the call is over, you will not be able to contact this person again. Your call will be recorded for legal purposes. Signing below indicates that you acknowledge that this establishment is in no way responsible for any negative mental, emotional, and/or physical reactions that a client may have, and that we cannot control how your recipient will react to your call. Closure is not guaranteed. Thank you.

I slide my driver's license onto the counter and sign the paper.

"Cash or credit?"

"Uh, debit," I say, slipping the card on top of my ID.

"Perfect, thank you. Feel free to take a magazine for your wait."

"Thanks."

I can't read right now, I need to figure out what I'm going to say. Five minutes? Five minutes. Years of questions and regret to fit into five minutes.

I can feel my heartbeat falter. The receptionist looks up from her paperwork.

"Don't worry, honey. Most people don't even need half the time."

Ah, is that supposed to be reassuring? I turn toward the seating area and look for a place to wait. I see an open seat next to an elderly woman.

"Who are you here for?" She's wearing readers and a turtleneck and is knitting a very tiny cardigan. There is a bouquet of roses in her lap.

"Um, my ex-boyfriend," I answer.

"I'm so sorry." She puts down her handiwork to hold my hand.

"Thanks," I shrugged. "It was a while ago, high school."

"I'm here for my husband," she grinned. "We decided to wait 'til our fiftieth anniversary to talk again."

I push a smile. "That's really sweet."

I look down at my ticket. Number 56.

"Number twenty-seven?" a man calls from behind the receptionist's desk.

An employee leads a boy, maybe ten years old, past the desk toward a single phone booth that stands at the end of the hall. I notice many of the people in the waiting room shifting their eyes in that direction frequently. Some people are crying, others are red, green, or white as a ghost. I put my headphones in.

Waiting so long to do this was a good idea. I don't have to run into any of his family members or obnoxiously compassionate acquaintance-friends. I'm sure they all jumped the gun hours after it happened. They're probably still writing to him on that stupid Facebook page.

I can be rational about this. It's been three years, I hardly feel anything about it anymore.

"Forty-two? Number forty-two."

What do I even say? It feels like all the questions I've been asking him in my head all this time are so insignificant. I don't need to know why anymore. He wouldn't tell me anyway. I'm strangely calm.

Soon enough, my number is called and I am shown to the phone. I deleted his contact but never his texts, so I know the whole number by heart. Isn't a payphone a little much? There is a bowl of change on a shelf next to the phone. I make the numbers beep. Now it's getting kind of hard to breath.

Distant millennium-esque rings begin to sound.

I miss you you're the worst I love you you left me you fucked me over losing you was the best thing that has ever happened to me most days you don't even cross my mind I don't think I really loved you I don't think I can ever love anyone else I just kind of want to shove you into a wall...beep...but here we are.

"Hello?" a voice sounds on the other end.

"...Hey. You still sound so different on the phone." A pause on his end indicates that he recognizes my voice. It's really him. I can't remember a single word I was planning on saying.

"How have you been?" he asks.

"Does it matter?"

"Fair enough. Say whatever you need to say to me."

"I don't forgive you."

He doesn't answer that.

"Was it worth it? Is this what you wanted? Don't you have any regrets?"

"Don't follow me," he interjects.

"Fuck off I was never planning on it."

"I know you go there sometimes."

"Not like you. And how could you know? You haven't been here."

"We wouldn't have gotten married or anything if that's what you're wondering."

"How do you know? You're being so--"

“Me? Yeah, dying doesn’t make me a different person or anything.”

“It doesn’t make you a person at all.”

A pause.

“Good point. Why are you so surprised I’m me?”

All of my anger and grief and heartbreak is exhausted but also very present. It feels like all of my muscles are flexing at once. I can’t tell if I’m shaking or not.

“Too many bad dreams I guess. My brain can only produce this terrifyingly off-brand version of you. You’re always lying to me or running away or dying. Sometimes I’m the one who kills you. It’s all mixed up.”

He hums in reply. Neither of us says anything for a while.

“It’s hard not knowing anyone like you,” I say.

“It’s good to hear your voice.”

“I don’t know how to care about people or things anymore.”

More quiet. I think he knows that we’re not really talking to each other anymore. Those were kind of always our best conversations. Then I remember the time limit and I get impatient.

“Did you know that hanging is like, one of the worst ways to kill yourself? In terms of like, duration of agony? I saw a chart once on Tumblr.”

“Oh,” he questions.

“Kind of dramatic too, if you ask me,” I add. “I’m the first person who’s given you shit here, aren’t I?”

“Not really, actually. Have you heard what my family and friends have been saying to me today?”

“No, what family and friends? It’s 2016. It’s probably been years since they all contacted you.”

“Oh...What took you so long?”

“What took you so *not* long? Ugh. I mean. I wasn’t going to ask why. Can I ask that? Can I ask why?”

He lets out a long, exasperated sigh. “I told you already I can’t tell you that. Even if-”

“But it’s over now.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Whatever. I don’t think any reason you could have given me would have been a good reason.”

You have two minutes and thirty seconds remaining on your call, a female voice informs us.

Huh.

“I can’t think of anything else I want to say to you,” I admit.

Another pause.

“I don’t have anything else to say either.”

"Okay, okay, wait, can you at least just stay on the line? You don't have to say anything."

It's quiet for a while. My breathing, his breathing, my heartbeat.

"We only have a few minutes anyway," I half-beg.

Well, *we* in a very loose sense of the word.

"Yeah, okay."

I listen to his breathing, steady and slow, until mine syncs up with his just like it used to. I can't tell if we're breathing this way naturally or if we're just trying not to freak out. Or if I'm just trying not to freak out.

"I'm older than you now."

"You are."

You have one minute remaining on your call.

Am I forgetting anything super important? Should I have maybe studied up before coming here?

Written things down?

You have thirty seconds remaining on your call.

It's fine. This is it.

You have ten seconds remaining on your call.

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too."

A click sounds, followed by a dial tone.