

Phone Call

by Jill Chan

It started when he didn't call me. We had set it up. Same time, same place. But for some reason, he must've forgotten to call me.

At first I shrugged it off, saying to myself again and again that he must just have forgotten it. I went about my day. It was good that I'd known him for over three years now. So this kind of thing was nothing, just a little mishap. He was probably still sleeping. Oh but it was night where he was. He probably had an early night and forgot all about it. Or maybe he had guests over and the call completely slipped his mind.

So I made breakfast and ate it, alone. The house was suddenly quieter. The table was cleaner. Everything seemed to be looking back at me. I felt defenceless against a whole room of closeness. I wanted to make this place come alive without him. I started cleaning the already clean table. I started wiping the mirror. Perhaps he would remember me then. Perhaps the mirror would look back at me and soothe me. It was nothing, it would say. You must go on with your day.

And I was 'going on with my day.' After cleaning the whole house, I attempted to read a book. I could shower but he might call while I was in the middle of it. The book held my interest. It was about a woman who fell in love with a rich man.

He was never rich but he could afford to forget me. My whole body was tensed up. My whole body was still waiting even after three hours. It was as if an hour were a minute and three minutes had passed.

Maybe he had an accident. Maybe he was going out to dinner and had a car accident. But it was all so improbable. The sane part of

you was reminding you. The mad part of you was standing by the door with your hand on the doorknob, waiting for him. He was supposed to call you on the phone but you deserved a visit from him after being forgotten like that. However far he was.

You began counting the times he had disappointed you, how many there were.

He refused to divorce his wife, for one. And he refused to call you. But it was not refusal, you were sure. He had done it many times before. He called you on Sunday mornings. That was the deal. That was your moment together. Now that it had become a long distance relationship. His wife had suspected and they moved away from their old place. Half way around the world.

Now you were alone, completely alone. You lived for his phone calls. And now he couldn't be trusted to keep a simple agreement. And we hadn't begun talking about love. Love was called into question but love remained silent, as silent as the phone.

You moved to the computer. You took out your cellphone again. Maybe there was a message from him. You looked but there was none.

The house was silent, as if waiting along with you. You tried to watch TV but the sound seemed more like noise. The world was a noisy place without him. The world was not a place with him in it but a heaven which fell.

It was simple. How could he forget something so simple. You kept telling yourself. You had referred to yourself in the second person again. Whenever you felt such uneasiness, language changed to accommodate you.

And I was merely waiting. I was doubting also, though still hopeful. Hopeful that I still endeared him, that our times together measured up. That he was nowhere if not with me. He was probably found out by his wife that he was calling me every Sunday.

I could call him. And be done with this waiting but I refused. I wanted him to not forget me first. To bring himself to remember me first before I'd give him the pleasure of my company.

Perhaps it was for the best, his forgetting me. The past year had been a nightmare. To not be able to feel him near. Perhaps he was finding it inadequate. Perhaps it was done. This was for the best.

Yes, I had decided even before he called me. Or failed to call me. I too was finding this difficult. Love was too much here to be thrown away but love could not survive distance the way it could be forgotten.

Three years of relationship distilled into three hours of waiting. Three hours of waiting stripped down to three minutes of decision. I had decided even before he failed to call me. That was what I wanted to think happened. Because a lover would do anything in order not to be left behind.

And I was leaving him. I was. Before I knew I was, I was.

