

Please Leave a Message  
[Draft 1]

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By AJ

PLEASE LEAVE A MESSAGE

SIMON is seated in some vague setting. Is he talking to a person, the camera, the audience, who's to say.

SIMON

I've had this theory for a long time: that your first conversation with someone is the most important. And yeah, I'm sure there are other important ones down the line, but the first one, that's the one where everything is established. If it goes well, great! If not, you have a lot of ground to recover, if you can.

And you know, conversation is a dying art form, at least in some opinions. A lot of people think conversation is dying because, well you know, younger generations and texting or whatever. A lot of people are trying to argue that instant communication is making humankind less communicative which just doesn't make sense to me. How is being able to communicate faster hurting communication?

But actually, I think I know what they mean. They mean in person, face-to-face communication. And hey, I mean, I struggle with face-to-face human interaction too. Maybe that's not a great thing to, you know, say, but actually I think that's the problem.

Communication is suffering because people are talking but not actually saying what they want to. They're being passive aggressive, or subtle, or hinting, or hiding their meanings. People want other people to hear what they mean without having to say it, which just doesn't seem fair, because then you're always bound to let them down.

They'll say something like, "Hey, how are you?" And instead of waiting to hear what you say, they're trying to figure out how to say, "yeah, I'm good too." But have it actually mean, "ask me why I'm good, so I can tell you about my new car without seeming to brag."

Or they'll say something like "sorry, I'm tired, I haven't been sleeping much lately" and really be trying to get you to notice aren't they aren't ok and want you to care about them.

But because some unknown societal rule has conditioned us to think we can't just say things like that, people try and layer meanings behind small talk and expect you to pick up on them, but they don't realize the other person is also busy trying to figure out a societally acceptable way to fit "I was just diagnosed with OCD and that's making it even harder than normal for me to figure out the boundaries of a 'normal' conversation" into "yeah, the weather is nice today." So all that's to say, I have had the risotto before, and it is quite good.

SIMON's date was clearly not expecting this.

So, I know that was a lot for a first date, but communication and honesty are an important part of any relationship. Not that this is a relationship, I mean it could be but um, friendships too, any ships. Really. Any interaction between two people. So I just thought... uh... What are you going to order?

Abrupt cut to SIMON returning home alone. He goes about his routine, eventually sitting down and checking his phone. He listens to his voice messages. [They can all be Simon's voice, or several different voices, a mix whatever] Throughout the voice mails, Simon continues his routine, vaguely listening. He starts by taking off his shoes, lining them up, taking off his tie, and putting it away.

VOICE 1

Hey Simon! I'm guessing the date went well since you're not responding, so, nice dude! Uh... anyway. I was just calling to remind you I'm gonna be gone for the next few days. You know, in case you try and reach me. Uh... call me back.

Next voice mail.

## VOICE 1

Hey! Me again. In case I didn't mention it last time, I'm going to be hard to reach for a few days because reception and uh, service will be weird, not cause I'm ignoring you. Cool. Just wanted to clarify.

Next voice mail.

## VOICE 1

Yeah, so my phone won't have good service because I'm going to South America on that business trip, remember? Anyway, they're putting me up in a four star resort but I'll probably be hiking in the Amazon or whatever, you know. It's chill. Anyway, I doubt the jungle has wifi so, I'll talk to you when I get back from my work vacation. Bye!

SIMON sighs. He starts the next message and makes himself a bowl of cereal. He chews each bite 5 times. 5 is very important to Simon.

## VOICE 2

Simon, it's me. So I know we haven't talked in a while and I just wanted to catch up. I'll be in town next week and thought we could get lunch or something. You're probably busy working or something, but really it will be my treat. I'll pay. I insist. Really, what's the fun in having money if you can't spoil others? See you then!

SIMON is doing paperwork. He messes up and folds the piece of paper to throw it away. The fold is very important.

## VOICE 3

Hello, is this Simon? They guy who lives in 5E? Stop leaving your trash on my side of the hall!

SIMON is brushing his teeth. He might apply toothpaste multiple times. He is very methodical.

## VOICE 4

How was the date? Seems like it went well. I'm assuming you would have texted me if it didn't. Good for you! You deserve a break. My date didn't go well. Unless you consider a guy crawling out the bathroom window to stick you with the bill and then texting you to venmo him gas money 'good.' Anyway. Guess it just wasn't meant to be. I want to hear about your date! Were they cute? My guy was really hot. Tall and muscular, I mean I'm surprised he fit through the bathroom window with all those muscles. But he did. Yeah, so I'd really like to talk to you, tell you all about it. Call me.

SIMON is folding clothes. Each shirt is folded and stacked or hung in the closet exactly the same. Ideally there are 5 shirts.

## VOICE 1

Hey buddy! South Africa's great! Did I say South Africa? I mean South America... I think. Whichever one's like downstairs from Texas. I had shots at the bar on the company tab because it's a work vacation! Ay! Ahaha. There was this girl there you would not believe. She's so hot. She was like really into me. And like, I kept telling her, you know, "I have a girlfriend, I have a girlfriend" but I don't know. I guess there's a language barrier or something. Aw, man, she had the hottest accent. You wouldn't have been able to speak around her, dude! You would have like blown up or something. I'm just... I'm just gonna tell her I have a girlfriend again tomorrow when we go to the pool. Oh, yeah. We're going to the pool tomorrow, but you know, I can look. I just can't touch.

SIMON is a little concerned. He goes to his phone... then changes his mind.

SIMON cleans his table. He cleans in sets of five. Wiping it down five times, spraying Windex five times, etc.

## VOICE 2

Simon, me again. So you never called back about lunch. It's ok, don't worry, I forgive you. I have plenty of free time and I know you're a working guy or whatever. I'll be in town longer than I thought now, so we can still catch up. I don't know if you saw my insta post, but that is my boat. So if you wanted we could take it out for a spin or something. Kevin-- you know my husband--said I don't know anything about boats but you know I do. I named it The Sweet Escape, get it? Like that Gwen Stefani song? Kevin said it was stupid, do you think it was? I think it's a good name for a boat. Anyway, call me back!

SIMON goes through his paper work.  
Organizing it. Folding the things  
that need to be thrown away. He  
clicks his pen five times.

## VOICE 3

Hello. Simon? Guy in 5E? This is your neighbor. I'm sorry if I seemed rude in my last message, and I'm sure there's a way we can work this out. If you want to discuss a compromise I am open. So, yeah.

SIMON washes his hand. He lathers  
them five times, counting to  
himself as he rinses them each  
time.

## VOICE 4

Hey, Simon! Just calling back. Haven't heard from you in a while. Hope you haven't forgotten about me! Ha ha. Kidding. Um. I was just wondering if you want to go see that movie on Saturday? It's supposed to be really good, and I've wanted to see it for a while now, but no one will go with me and what kind of werido goes to the movies by themselves? God, I sound so lame right now. Sorry. Um. I'd just really like to talk to you. Call me back.

SIMON drums his fingers five times.

## VOICE 1

Hey Simon, it's Max. Um. I think I might have made a mistake. Will you call me back? I need to talk to someone.

SIMON cleans his counter, in the same patterns of five as before.

## VOICE 2

So, I know our other plans fell through, but I am still in the city. I'm staying in a cute little B&B. Actually, I'm thinking about staying here longer? Maybe a lot longer? So whenever you have time. I'm free. Lots of free time. Uh, I feel like we have a lot to catch up on. Call me. It's um Viv from school. I don't think I mentioned that in the other messages. Wouldn't that be funny? I was just leaving messages and you had no idea who they were from. Maybe that's why you didn't call me back. So um, yeah, it's Viv. Call me back.

SIMON continues his paperwork. Making five piles. Clicking his pen five times. Folding paper before he throws it away. Etc.

## VOICE 3

I realized I never introduced myself, I'm Daniel, you're neighbor in 5D. So, I'm sorry I lost my temper in that first call. It was just a bad day and, I am sorry. That is not the right way to meet your neighbors, is it? So if you'd like to talk or meet in person, I would really appreciate it. Again, sorry about that first call.

SIMON brushes he teeth again. Reapplying toothpaste. Carefully, methodically brushing. He hesitates more though.

## VOICE 4

Hey, Simon, it's Jennifer. Have you been avoiding me? Did I do something wrong? I'm sorry about whatever I did. I'm sure I didn't mean it. If you tell me what it is I can make it up to you. I just really miss you. Can you call me? Or text me? Or you know, whatever makes you more comfortable. I just... I miss you. I'm really sorry. Please call me.

SIMON contemplating calling the voices back. He is folding socks. The exact same way each time. He pauses to listen every once in a while.

## VOICE 1

Simon, it's Max. Again. I really need to talk to someone. I made a huge mistake and... god... Angie's gonna kill me if she finds out. I kind of hooked up with that girl from the bar. It was just a one time thing, I swear! I just... I don't know what to do. I should tell Angie, right? That's the right thing to do, but... but what if she leave me? I mean, it's what I deserve, I get it, but I... I just love her so much. How could I be so stupid? How could I do something like this? I'm such an idiot! Argh! I really need to talk to someone, Simon. Call me.

SIMON arranges his chairs around the table so they are all in the perfect position. He pauses to listen. Maybe he even sits.

## VOICE 2

This is Viv. Viv McNamara? Well, technically Viv Sonders now. I know it's weird, and we haven't talked since high school, but we used to be friends and I'm really sorry we lost touch when I moved in with Kevin. Um. I'm moving back to town now. It's um it's great. It's what I needed to do. I know this is strange, but I could really use a friend right now, and you used to be really easy to talk to, so. So if you could meet with me, I would really appreciate it. Thanks.

SIMON is doing paperwork.  
Organizing, folding, clicking.  
Listening.

## VOICE 3

Hello Simon! How are you? It's Dan, 5D. I'm having a little get together on Saturday night, nothing too loud don't worry, ha ha. Anyway, um. I was wondering if you would want to come by. It's not too far out of your way, ha ha. It'll just be a small group, um.

Actually, I don't know if anyone else will even show. But it's my birthday, so, ha ha. Gotta hope, you know. If you don't it's no big deal, more cake for me, but um. I think it's important to know your neighbors. Community values, and camaraderie. So uh, yeah. Saturday at 6, or whenever you want to stop by. 5D.

SIMON folds towels, but he keeps starting over, distracted.

VOICE 4

Hey, it's Jennifer. I'm starting to kind of freak out. I haven't heard from you in a while. And I just... are you ok? Are you alive? I've been doing a lot of thinking and I just would really like to talk to you. Please, please, please, call me back.

SIMON lines up his shoes, checking that they are each in line. He might also check his closet, everything is equally spaced out. He listens.

VOICE 1

Simon. It's Max. Sorry about the last call, I uh. I shouldn't have put all of that on you like that. I would still appreciate your advice, but I think I need to talk to Angie. We've had a lot going on, and this trip just came at a bad time. we've been going through a lot, but that's not your problem, I really need to just talk to her about it. Anyway. I'm cutting my trip short. I'm gonna fly back soon. Let's catch up. I haven't heard from you in a while. How have you been? I'd really like to see you soon. After I talk to Angie of course. Talk to you soon.

SIMON is eating. It might be cereal again. Every bite is chewed 5 times. But he pauses and listens more.

VOICE 2

Simon, I don't know if you saw the tabloids or not, but that's not me.

Kevin is just using his money to make me look bad so he can take everything in the divorce. I know this looks so bad, but I'm not the same stupid girl I was in high school. I'm not. I'm a good person. At least I can be. I just really need a friend right now because everyone is leaving me and you were always so good at talking and listening and giving advice. I know I don't deserve to be your friend after all these years, but could you please give me a chance? I will be such a better friend this time around. I want to hear all about you and your job and everything. Do you and Jennifer still hang out? Maybe the three of us could meet up sometime. I want to hear everything I missed since I've been gone. Please, just give me a chance. This is Viv, again.

SIMON is doing paper work again. As he listens, he stops. He takes a blank piece of paper and writes 5D on it. He folds it and sets it aside. He takes another piece of paper and writes Daniel on it.

VOICE 3

Hey Simon, it's Dan. 5D. Sorry if I've been bombarding you. Uh. My therapist suggested I reach out to people and I haven't had a good track record with that. Uh. But you looked like a nice guy. Your phone's ringing all the time so I uh, figured you must be good at this whole talking to people thing. I haven't done much talking since my daughter passed. I've done a lot of yelling though. Sorry about that. I'm working on that. If you'd be ok meeting me sometime, I'd love to talk. No pressure. Sorry again.

SIMON places the paper that says Daniel on a tupperware presumably full of food. He heads toward the door, but stops and runs back to his phone.

VOICE 4

Simon, I have to talk to you. You have to answer me eventually. I will call you a hundred times if that's what it takes. I don't know what happened between us, but whatever it is we can fix it!

I care about you a lot, and I don't want to lose you. Please talk to me. If you won't I will. I will ramble for hours and hours about complete nonsense because I like talking to you. And I miss it. And there is so much I want to tell you! Bathroom window guy texted me again. I saw the movie and it was just mediocre but the ticket seller was so rude! He said something about how he felt bad for me going to the movies alone and I wanted to tell him that I didn't plan on going to the movies alone but that I wanted to go with an awesome guy but he didn't pick up his phone, but I didn't I just order a large popcorn. There are so many things I want to tell you, but I don't want to talk to your answering machine, I want to talk to you! So the next time I call you better pick up your phone, because I really like you and that is just something we're going to have to figure out. But we can't do that if one of us is doing all the talking. So please call me back. Actually no. I'm going to call you again. Please, just pick up the phone.

The phone rings. SIMON stares at it. Unsure what to do. It rings five times. SIMON picks it up.

SIMON

Hello?

THE END