

My God has a telephone.

I

He said we'd met before in the pool of souls. He believed in reincarnation. He said we had unfinished business.

I planned to meet him at the farmer's market the morning I found my daughter's suicide bookbag. This is hard. My fifteen-year-old daughter had recently been hospitalized for suddenly going off her depression and anxiety meds. This was how I discovered she was bipolar or had ADHD or was just a gay teen in rural South Carolina. *It is impossible to say*. This was also how I discovered the new hire who I was in a talking stage with had some type of paranoia. I won't diagnose him. I don't know. And this is precisely the problem: *I don't know*.

We'd planned to meet at the farmer's market. But I had a funny feeling as I stepped out of the shower: *Check her room*.

That's when I found the bookbag. In it: a thick rope which she'd fastened into a noose, a red Swiss army knife, a pillowcase, and a paper that said, I fucking want to kill myself. It said it in her handwriting about twenty-five times, a long list of that one intrusive thought.

You could've sent a text, he said later.
When you found the bookbag, you could've texted.

But I didn't.

The farmer's market was about to close. I could dispose of it and then meet him for a quick hello before my daughters woke up. Grace had been back from the hospital for about a week. The meds were beginning to work. She was well enough for me to be gone for a half hour—an hour, tops—while she slept. I walked into the kitchen and glanced toward my bedroom. I could feel her asleep. I had about another half an hour, forty-five minutes max.

I put the bookbag in the trunk and returned to the kitchen. Five minutes passed and then ten. My fingers slowly began to feel intelligible. I texted him that I was running late—and backspaced it to hell. I texted him that I couldn't come—that something had come up—but this, too, felt flakey. While bent over erasing, I heard my bedroom door slowly sound. Grace walked out. She regarded me *good morning* and then noticed her bedroom door ajar, her things strewn around from my search. What's going on, she asked but not as a question.

Nothing. But it was a lie. She ran into her room. Where is it. What did you do with it.

With what? I was now twenty minutes late. My phone buzzed. I didn't look.

The whole plan to get rid of the bookbag took another hour: My best friend Stella came to my house to “fix the dryer” while I “ran an errand.”

I texted him: Meet me at the dumpsters near Walmart.
I would explain. He would understand. And then we’d dispose of the bookbag together.
It all went off without a hitch, except he didn’t understand.

I’m sorry I couldn’t come.
You could’ve texted.
But I found my daughter’s suicide bookbag.
Can you look me in the eye and tell me you’re not cheating?

This man has a Ph.D. This professor who understands character-driven plot could not understand my situation.

Do you want to see the rope—the *knife*?
No, no.

Get out. Pop the trunk. Throw away your daughter’s suicide plan.
Watch him watch you do it.

That should’ve been the end. I should’ve called it when I saw my calm words bouncing off his glassy eyes and into his lap. But I drove back home and took care of my daughters and tried to breathe and walked the dog. I was just returning from that walk when he texted:

I’m driving to Indiana for Christmas. I need to see my family. I need time to think. I’m turning off my phone.

Don’t look away. This is the second time I could’ve left. A red flag. I saw it as another man walking away the moment there is trouble. Which is what I told Stella right before I called him.

When my ex-wife left me, the moving truck was already packed.
My mother tested *coffee beans* for poison when she accused my father of cheating.
I don’t think you cheated; I’m turning around.

II

The second red flag is much shorter: he texted me goodnight an hour earlier than usual. I went to bed an hour later than usual. In the two-hour lag, he convinced himself I'd cheated, again.

III

Third red flag: On the first day of school, I didn't have time to stop by to see him in the coffeeshop before I taught because I got stuck in my office with a colleague. He stopped by instead and saw me before I put on my new glasses.

I texted: Sadly, you missed the glasses.

He texted: I'm done. Don't text me. Don't call me. Don't come to my office or apartment. And yes, I'm breaking up with you via text. You don't deserve a face-to-face conversation. P.S. He seems like a good guy.

It's not okay to treat me this way.

At one-thirty the next morning, his reply: I'm sorry. Maybe I misunderstood your text. Maybe I'm not ready for a relationship after all.

I asked the Internet what to do if my "boyfriend" repeatedly accused me of cheating, and the entirety of humanity, at least the humans archived online, said in unison, aloud, and in no uncertain terms, *Leave*.

But my heart said, My God has a telephone.

It took a million years. Or two hours, at least, before I was ready. Grace was nowhere near well but getting better—now a month on her meds and sleeping again in her own bed.

I texted: I hear you're not ready for a relationship. I'm not, either.