

# Phones

*Zachary Riley*

WE'RE BEHIND THE red door, on the sixth floor, with two mattresses pushed together on the carpet. We're laying there, completely unaware of what our lives will turn into.

I'm on my back looking up at the books she has stacked on the cut-out of the wall. There's a title with a bookmark in it. Something about sugar being the new poison. Behind it, a dust jacketed Bible and a few other books, photography titles mostly. She's facing me on her side, on the nicer mattress of the two, running her eyes and fingers along the screen of her phone. I don't have one of those touch screen phones yet. I guess I'm jealous. I don't know why I'm jealous. Maybe it's because the phone takes up so much of her attention or I'm just looking for something to put all my attention into.

She has her right leg straddled over my right leg and her knee is nestled right up against my balls. It's certainly something and I'll take it over nothing. Occasionally she lets out a giggle or a gasp and I look over at her, expecting to be filled in on what is going on. I find myself watching her expressions, a furrow of the brows, a widening of the eyes, a pursing of the lips, sometimes a smile. She's in a different world with that phone. A world I'm jealous of.

I have fantasies about that phone. Usually they start when I'm looking out of the apartment windows. It's an amazing view from the sixth floor, overlooking the old cemetery and all the Edwardian and Victorian townhouses tightly packed together. It's like looking through a tilt shift from up here. It's amusing and relaxes me. All the cars are like matchboxes. Everything is so small and insignificant.

I enjoy watching the traffic along Alexandra Parade. It banks up at unexpected times and stagnates to a slow trickle. I hear people hitting their horns with different levels of intensity, all slightly different takes on the same impatience. It feels good to not be a part of the calamity. They're all trapped to a singular fate. All frustrated within their little metal frames on wheels. All sitting on their cushioned car seats, radios tuned in to something that will help them forget. Then the brake lights come on and the horns start again and the phones are picked up from their laps.

The other week I heard a crash. It didn't sound like anything serious, but something was happening. Looking down I saw that a Toyota Camry had been rear-ended by a Honda Jazz. I pulled up a chair from the dining table and watched it play out. For a while it seemed like neither driver knew what to do. Both cars just idled in the right lane while the cars in front began to peel off towards whatever standstill was up ahead.

Anna had been sitting at her desk doing all the postproduction on a few shots from a set that she had been working on. A steady run of traffic was quickly coming up behind the two pranged-up cars. I figured Anna would want to see how all of this was going to unfold too.

'Hey, come and get a load of this shit.' I called out. I heard her position herself out of the chair and begin to walk over to where I was sitting.

The driver of the Jazz, a young woman, realised the hold-up that her car was about to cause and tried her luck at getting over to the gutter. It couldn't have been worse timing. A black sedan, some European thing, had been going the speed limit in the left hand lane. I guess the drivers hadn't seen each other and the black sedan just ploughed right into the side of the Jazz. The doors crumpled up and the left tail light spat out on to the bitumen before being obliterated by the tyre of the black sedan. Both cars now looked like total write offs.

'Holy shit!' Anna gasped. 'Do you think they got hurt?'

'Let's hope not,' I said, but I wanted everyone in that whole scene to be hurt. I wanted lights and sirens and crowds and coroners and whatever other pandemonium they could offer me.

Anna pulled her phone out and started taking photos. I got up from the chair and walked over to the fridge to fix myself a drink. Anna had her ass sticking out, elbows leaning on the window sills, taking happy snaps of the bedlam below. 'What are you doing taking photos?' I asked.

‘I want to show Mum. I’ve told her about all the accidents that happen here.’

I walked back over and saw that the Camry had made its way over to the gutter and the driver was standing over the Jazz that was now perpendicular with the road.

I looked at Anna, putting filters over the image on her phone. ‘And why would your mother want to see this?’ I asked.

‘Because, I’m always telling her about the accidents we see on this road.’ She turned to me and the smile disappeared from her face, ‘Is that alright with you?’

I took a sip of my drink, ‘Sure, baby.’

I sat on the couch and turned the TV on. One of those reality cooking shows was airing, but I kept my focus on Anna, watching her ass in those jeans, seeing the enjoyment she got out of using that phone. I thought about prying it from her manicured hands and tossing the damn thing out onto Alexandra Parade. Then I thought about the fallout that would result from that and went back to watching someone struggle to make a zucchini gratin.

That was just the other week, but every day it feels like she’s always on that phone. Always living in a world I have no part in. I brush her leg off from my balls now and lift myself up to go to the bathroom. When I come back out, Anna has repositioned onto her back, her knees up in the air, heels tucked up against her ass.

We’ve been on these mattresses all afternoon and my legs are getting restless. ‘What do you feel like doing for dinner?’ I ask. The back of the phone is covering her face.

‘I don’t know. I don’t really feel like cooking though.’ She says.

‘You wanna go out and get something then?’ I suggest, expecting her to put the phone down but I can see her fingers tapping away at things on the screen.

‘Yeah, we could do that.’ She says between taps. I prod her with a few more questions until she puts the phone down and gives me that frustrated look only a lover can get away with.

‘Do you want to leave now?’ She says, as if talking to a child.

‘Well, yeah . . . when you’re ready.’

Once dusk has made way for night we leave the apartment. We’re now walking hand in hand down Lygon Street and I have to keep brushing off all the shills beckoning us to eat at their restaurant. I’m really sick of Italian so we keep walking. I see a place that serves

noodles and suggest it to Anna. ‘No,’ she says, ‘I don’t like *that* place.’

‘Well, where do you feel like eating?’ I ask, figuring it will be easier that way.

‘I don’t know,’ she says, ‘what do you feel like?’

I stop walking and give her a real foul look. ‘Well, I just suggested the Asian place and you knocked that back.’

‘Yeah, but I told you I don’t like *that* place,’ she says.

‘Well what place do you like, Anna?’

‘I don’t know, why don’t we just get a pizza?’

We’ve walked past most of the Italian restaurants and all I see is a Dominoes up ahead. I nod towards the Dominoes. ‘You wanna just get something from there?’

She lers her eyes at me. ‘If we’re going to get pizza, I don’t want to go *there*.’

I find myself groaning and our hands separate. ‘Well, Anna, you tell me where *you* want to go.’ I say to her.

She snaps back at me, ‘You’re the one who wanted to come out here. Why do I have to decide?’

I light up a cigarette and think about the ridiculousness of it all. I watch her pull out her phone and her fingers begin moving frantically over the screen, like she’s getting something off her chest. I let her go for a bit before saying anything.

‘You can decide, because I just suggested two places and you blew them both off. So make a fucking decision, alright?’ I should have waited a bit longer, tried to calm myself down.

Anna looks up from her phone. ‘Don’t *yell* at me.’ I take a few drags of the cigarette and look around expecting someone to be watching us.

Anna takes a seat on a bench and I can see her face illuminated by the screen, bemused by something. I don’t want to see her smiling right now. ‘Anna,’ I say, ‘I’m not *yelling* at you. I’m just saying, if you don’t like my suggestions why don’t you make the decision?’

Her fingers keep tapping away at the phone and she ignores me. I can see where this is going.

‘Anna!’

‘What?’ she snaps.

‘Did you even hear what I just said?’ She looks up at me as if I’m a fucking idiot.

‘Listen, you’re the one who dragged me out here and I’m not even that hungry,’ she says.

My appetite has gone. I’m about ready to act out one of my phone fantasies but I stomp out the cigarette and decide to start walking.

I get a few paces down the road and she looks up from her phone. ‘What are you doing now?’ She asks. ‘Where are you going?’

I have my back towards her and continue walking. ‘Zac, can you please answer me? *Where* are you going?’ She calls out. I turn around and look at her. She has stood up from the bench now, phone still clutched in hand. She’s expecting me to say something to her, expecting me to make nice and resolve this. We’re only about ten metres away from each other, but it may as well be the distance to the moon. I look at her, awaiting me to say something.

‘Fuck this!’ I shout. ‘I’m going home.’