

Overall Tasmanian Winner

Zoe Gangell – The Friends' School

The Line Went Silent

Ring, ring. Ring, ring.

My ringtone mimicked our house bell, demanding my attention as if on my doorstep, cornering me into conversations I try so hard to avoid.

I never realized how bad the hit would be until it landed. I didn't see it at the time. I just moved from the firelit warm lounge room to the empty cold kitchen where the phone was kicking up a fuss atop the counter.

Grabbing it, I gave a short, "what?"

All I heard was static silence drowned by shallow and sharp breaths. I took the phone away from my ear and looked down at the number, hoping to see an Unknown Caller ID.

It wasn't.

I should have caught on quicker but I've always been a little late to the punch.

I brought the phone back to my ear. "Hey, hey Des."

I heard a sharp intake over the static silence. I could see her, standing at an empty bus shelter or walking alone to Franklin Square. She replied in such a normal voice, "Hi Milly, I didn't think you'd pick up."

I looked out the window, knowing damn well the sun had set ages ago. After a short pause that I hoped was not too long, I chuckled lightly, "I always answer your calls."

A sharp static silence was her reply.

"We haven't talked since Thursday. How are you?"

"Well," she started, "like shit."

"You mean-" I retracted my words and stuffed a fist into my mouth. "What are you doing?"

A siren blared past, blurring half of what she said. "-really nice and I thought it would be good - not healthy, but for my stress. I was wrong though. Again. So, I'm here now, walking around in the middle of the night."

Shit. "You're smoking in the middle of the night. On your own."

Static silence. It stretched like an endless road chilled with black ice and unsuspecting death.

"What street are you on?"

"I ran away."

I shuffled out of the kitchen to the dark patio steps. The lights flicker on with my movement, illuminating the few meters around me but also limiting my vision. "That's fine. Have you called anyone?"

"No."

"OK. Are you visiting someone?"

"No."

"Alright." I walked back inside, eyeballing the key rack before taking my set and making my way down the corridor. "Where are you again?"

"I'm on the bridge."

My eyes widened while my stomach sunk, "The Bridge? That's a little far."

Static silence.

"Hey Des, talk to me."

“Ah,” She muttered and I breathed out as silently as I could, “yeah, it was a little far. Climbing to the middle was tiring but the cool air is nice.”

I stalked, almost ran, back into the lounge room. My mum looked up at me, startled when I handed her the landline. “Yeah? Surely Bellerive beach has a better view.” I commented over the phone before pulling it away and whispering harshly, “Call triple zero and tell them Des is attempting suicide on Tasman Bridge.”

She frowned but quickly dialled the number, explaining the broken situation I tried to convey without leaving the conversation from over the static line.

“Hey, hey Des, how about we talk in person. I’ll be fifteen from the Eastern side, so how about you meet me there?”

I heard sirens again, in the blaring background but I could do nothing as she whispered into the phone, “don’t worry Milly, I won’t be around to cause any more problems.”

“No, wait!”

But all I heard was the beep, beep as she ended the call and the line went silent.