

'The Lost Call'

By

Jasmine Barton

'Tring Tring' Anthology

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AUTOMATED VOICE
you have - 1 - new message. New
messages:

FATHER
hello, son. I haven't heard from you
in a while. I'm not expecting you to
ring me back - I'm guessing the signal
isn't too good out wherever you are.
But, yeah.... I just wanted to let you
know that I miss you and-

A beep signifies the line going dead.

1 AT SEA

Sounds of crashing waves can be heard in the background,
bashing against the metal walls of the ship. Machinery and
electronics murmur and hum in the background - a rhythmic
pulsation against the unpredictable ocean.

CRAIG (late 20s) whistles to himself, trying to pass the
time. No other human sounds populate the space. He must be
alone.

The waves start to grow in intensity. It seems a long, stormy
night is ahead.

A beep startles Craig from his daydream.

AUTOMATED VOICE
incoming transmission. This call may
be recorded for security purposes

Another long beep. Then slight crackling.

YOUNG GIRL
hello?

A YOUNG GIRL (10-12) murmurs unconfidently. An East London
accent can be detected in her voice.

Quiet. Craig is almost too stunned to respond.

YOUNG GIRL
is anyone there?

Hear him click a button and lift up the phone.

CRAIG
hello?

YOUNG GIRL
(clearer)
hello?

CRAIG
I hear you. Can I help you?

There is a slight delay between their answers.

YOUNG GIRL
who are you?

CRAIG
I'm Officer Craig Williams. This is
the Navy ship Condor 2-0-0-3. What do
you want?

YOUNG GIRL
(distressed)
my father. Is he there?

A sharp breath in... then a frustrated exhale. Craig doesn't deal with these types of things.

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CRAIG
what's his name?

YOUNG GIRL
Tom

CRAIG
his full name

YOUNG GIRL
sorry, Mr Williams. Thomas. Thomas
Asher.

CRAIG
hold on

Craig puts the phone down. Clicking can be heard.

YOUNG GIRL
what's that clicking sound?

Craig ignores her, continuing his work. Waves still crash in the background.

A beat.

YOUNG GIRL
hello?

CRAIG
I said hold on, please

YOUNG GIRL
sorry, Mr Williams

Some more clicking. Hear him pick the phone back up.

CRAIG
your father isn't on this ship. Sorry

YOUNG GIRL
but... are you sure?

CRAIG
I've just checked the database. I'm
very sure

YOUNG GIRL
I don't understand. I've called so
many places. I can't find him anywhere

CRAIG
sorry about that. I can't help you any
further, though. I suggest you hang up
now

YOUNG GIRL
but... I want to find my father

CRAIG
I can't help you with that. I'm sure
he'll turn up eventually

YOUNG GIRL
I hope so. I'm just scared. I keep
hearing people say that not many
anchor clankers come back

CRAIG
anchor clankers?
(sighs)
well, I don't know who's telling you
that, but it's not true. Many of us
come back. Our job is not as violent
and crazy as people seem to think. In
fact, I find it quite boring, most of
the time

YOUNG GIRL
are you bored now?

CRAIG
look, I don't think you should be
asking me personal questions. I'm
going to end the transmission now-

YOUNG GIRL
-but I used my pocket money to make
this call. I just want to find my
father

CRAIG
pocket money? To make a phone call?

YOUNG GIRL
I'm using the phone box. We don't have
a phone. You must be lucky to have one

CRAIG
I guess I am

The line starts to get weaker.

YOUNG GIRL
why can I hear myself talking after
I've said the words?

CRAIG
it's just a time lag in the signal.
It's normal when you call someone
overseas. Sometimes it can be quite
severe.

YOUNG GIRL
oh. I didn't know that. It's weird.

CRAIG
it's not weird - it's just what
happens. Look, are you finished now?
I'm sorry, but I can't help you
anymore and I need to concentrate on
my work

YOUNG GIRL
please, just... can you talk to me
until my time is up? I'm scared

CRAIG
do you not have someone else to talk

to?

YOUNG GIRL
not really. My mother is pretty sad.
She doesn't like to talk at the moment

CRAIG
what are you scared of?

YOUNG GIRL
living here. I don't like it anymore.
So many of my friends are gone, but
I'm staying behind
(almost to herself)
you must think I'm a chicken

CRAIG
where have they gone?

YOUNG GIRL
away. They went away on a train

CRAIG
a train to where?
YOUNG GIRL
all over the country. Out in the
sticks

CRAIG
why?

YOUNG GIRL
I don't know. Mother said it was for a
trip and that they will be back soon

CRAIG
a school trip?

YOUNG GIRL
I don't think so. My teacher is still
here, and some other people. But most
of them are gone

Craig sighs - a heavy breath.

CRAIG
oh, I see. I'm sorry you couldn't go
with them

YOUNG GIRL
well, mother has packed a small bag
for me. I might be able to join them
soon

CRAIG
that's good

A pause. The waves crash in the background. The line
crackles.

YOUNG GIRL
it sounds dangerous out there. Where
are you?

CRAIG
I can't tell you that, I'm afraid

YOUNG GIRL
(sigh)
everyone is so secretive. Nobody tells
me anything. I'm just confused.

CRAIG
that's because you're a kid. Children
don't need to know everything
sometimes

YOUNG GIRL
I don't feel like one. I thought kids
are meant to have fun

CRAIG
Can you hold for a moment? I just need
to look at something

YOUNG GIRL
okay

Craig starts clicking away again.

CRAIG
(to himself)
interesting...

More clicking.

CRAIG
(to himself)
how can a number no longer exist?

YOUNG GIRL
Mr Willaims? I can't hear you

Craig picks up the phone.

CRAIG
Since I can't tell you much about myself, how about you tell me some things about you? Where are you?

YOUNG GIRL
I'm in London

CRAIG
and you live there?

YOUNG GIRL
yes

CRAIG
you're using a phone box to make this call, right?

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_{yes}

CRAIG
and this call isn't a joke?

YOUNG GIRL
why would you think that?

CRAIG
because I can't trace this number. It has no origin. Is someone telling you to make this call?

YOUNG GIRL
no!
(distressed)
I just want to find my father

CRAIG
its okay. If no one is telling you to do this, it's fine. I just had to ask, is all, just to check

YOUNG GIRL
have I done something wrong?

CRAIG
no, it's okay, calm down

YOUNG GIRL
I can't calm down! I've had enough!

CRAIG
look, it's... what's your name?

YOUNG GIRL
Betty

CRAIG
okay, Betty. It's alright. I'm sorry
if I upset you. Just... try to relax,
alright?

BETTY
alright

Craig gives her a few moments to calm down. Waves crashing
against the ship start to make it harder to hear the
weakening signal.

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BETTY
do you get to see your father?

Craig takes in a sharp breath. The question caught him off
guard.

CRAIG
uhm... sorry?

BETTY
please tell me. I know you told me not
to ask you personal questions. I'm
sorry. I just want to know. It would
make me feel better. I feel so alone

CRAIG
uhm... I haven't for quite a long
time, no

BETTY
has he gone away too?

CRAIG
no. I'm the one who went away

BETTY
you got sent away?

CRAIG
I chose to go

BETTY
you must be brave

A pause.

BETTY
is he nice? Your father?

Craig struggles to get an answer out.

CRAIG
yeah. He's more than nice, actually.
He's great

BETTY
what's his name?

CRAIG
John

BETTY
John. That's a very nice name. When I
have a son, I would like to call him
John

Craig chuckles.

BETTY
why don't you see him? I would love to
see my father

A beat. Craig hesitates. His anxious breathing is barely
audible over the waves. He's gone over this question himself
almost every night - yet, an answer seems impossible to say.

CRAIG
uhm... I'm not sure. I... made some
mistakes back at home. I guess I'm
just embarrassed. If I go home, see
him... I have to face those mistakes,
you know?

BETTY
that's okay. Everyone makes mistakes.
I'm sure he still loves you. My father
still loves me when I make a mistake

CRAIG
Yeah, I'm... I'm sure your right.
(slight pause)
I'm sure you don't make mistakes like
I did. You sound like a nice person,
Betty

BETTY
thank you, Sir

CRAIG
please, call me Craig

BETTY
okay. Hello, Craig

He chuckles again.

A beep is heard.

BETTY
my time has almost run out

CRAIG
well then, Betty. I know you keep
saying your scared. Can you just
assure me that you are safe and you
have someone to look after you?

BETTY
I have my mother. But I can't say I'm
safe. It's not safe here at the moment

CRAIG
not safe in what way?

BETTY
what do you mean? It's a war.

A beat. *What does she mean? What war?*

BETTY
You're a anchor clanker. You should
know!

CRAIG
a war? But... you said you were in
London, Betty?

BETTY
I am!

CRAIG
there is no war in London. Or in
England, for that matter

BETTY
of course there is. Why do you think
my father is gone? Is that not why you
went away, too?

Craig's laboured breathing returns. A sickness churns in his stomach. *Something isn't right.*

CRAIG
what's your full name, Betty?

BETTY
Betty Asher

CRAIG
and your mothers name?

BETTY
Ruth Asher. Why?

CRAIG
what about her maiden name?

BETTY
what do you mean?

CRAIG
her name before she married your
father

BETTY
I am not quite sure. I think... I
think it's Perkins. Why?

A crash of plastic is heard as the phone crashes against the desk.

BETTY
hello?

Craig's shock and anxiety can almost be felt through the silence. The sounds of the waves crashing against the metal ship are the perfect personification for Craig's inner turmoil. *This can't be real.*

Another longer beep is heard.

BETTY
Craig? I'm going to have to go soon.
My time is almost up

CRAIG
Betty, I know this might sound silly,
but... what year is it?

BETTY
1940

A pause. Craig battles his lungs for air.

BETTY
Craig?

CRAIG
(shaky, laboured breaths)
Grandma?

BETTY
Grandma? What do you mean? You're
talking a lot of gobbledegook. Are you
feeling alright?
Craig releases a saddened, charmed sigh. It's been a long
time since he's heard '*gobbledegook*'.

Through the crackly, dying transmission signal, a booming
alarm can be heard so loudly it almost vibrates the phone
gripped tightly in Craig's hand.

BETTY
oh no. It's happening. I'm scared,
Craig

CRAIG
it's okay. Everything will be alright.
I can promise, you are going to make
it through. Go find your mother and
hide. And, I just want to say... I'm
sorry, Grandma. I really am. I've
always wanted to tell you that

BETTY
I don't know what you mean. But, if
you see my father... please, tell him
I love-

A long beep. The line goes dead.

A beat. Craig sits in silence, just the sounds of the waves and machinery now fill the room. A few deep, self soothing breaths are taken. The sound of plastic against plastic as Craig puts the phone down.

Rustling is heard.

Then, the sounds of iPhone clicking. Then ringing... ringing... ringing...

FATHER
hello, son. Long time no see!

Only Craig's shocked and laboured breathing can be heard vibrating down the phone line.

FATHER
son? Are you alright?

CRAIG
hello... dad

THE END.

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