

The Cell

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Today is the big day where we get the final answers. This isn't healthy for her. She is literally going crazy and we need to seek help before her phone, which connects to the dead, ends up putting her into a patient here at the psych ward. Every day is getting worse for her and we are running out of time. She needs to understand death and learn to accept that her aunt is no longer alive. We just unplugged the phone and removed the charger. The battery is eventually going to die and after that we'll determine what's going to happen. If she can function without her phone, or if we give her another phone, would she be able to communicate with the dead? If she can't function, to what extreme will she go?

Six Months Earlier

Around 11 p.m. Renee's phone rang. Her heart sunk into her stomach. Looking over at the end table next to her bed, she could see the I-phone 8 she'd just gotten in February. It lit up and flashed a name. It was Val, the cousin who doesn't talk to her unless something bad has happened. She fights the urge to decline the call, but then swipes to accept the call. She was laying in bed, but sits up and puts the phone up to her ear. She releases a 'hello' to indicate, 'you just woke me up from my sleep so get to the point already'. The voice on the other end was gargled and not very clear. It seemed like she could hear crying in the background, but nothing definite. She repeated the word "Hello" this time more concerned. She waited a few seconds for a response, but it did not come. She removed the phone from her ear and looked at the phone's screen to see if the call was connected. It was. As she was about to hit the end button on her phone, her cousin finally spoke words that still to this day she would never forget, words that said her aunt Gettie, Val's mom, had lost the battle with COPD and has entered into eternal bliss. Hoping for a different answer, she held the phone back to her ear to confirm if what she thought she heard was true. Her cousin questions "Are you there?" She was speechless. The tears began to fall. She pushes the end button on her screen and drops the phone. She falls back on her bed and

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closes her eyes thinking back to the time she had with her aunt when she was young.

She was three years old and sitting in the most uncomfortable wooden chair in her aunt Gettie's house, in the living room in front of the old box tv, with her aunt standing behind her tackling the afro on top of her head. Her battle weapons were a spray bottle mixed with detangler, conditioner and some water shaken all together. She had plenty of hair combs. They were the first to be destroyed when attempting to comb her niece's hair. It would either get stuck or break off. She would literally drench her hair in her concoction that she put together, trying to make it surrender to the comb, using gentle slow strides while still checking in with her to ask if she was ok. She did her best not to hurt her.

She smiles and is suddenly content and at peace. She opens her eyes and wipes the tears from them.

She sits back up and feels around on her covers for her cellphone she dropped which laid by her feet.

She picks up her phone and lies back down. She presses the *turn on* button and swipes through it until she reaches her *messenger* app. She scrolls to her aunts name and reads the messages they sent back in forth every night to one another. Her whole life was written in text, for she confided in her aunt and told her everything. She was the only one that she trusted to keep her deepest secrets, she was the most genuine person she knew who would tell her the truth and was honest with her even when it wasn't what she wanted to hear. That's what she loved the most about her.

One text reads about her being on cloud nine because Cupid struck her. She sends a text to her with a picture of her new love. He is handsome, posing with his shirt off and only wearing a six pack to match his guns as he flexes; tall and dark skinned with hazel eyes and a slight grin on his face; juicy plumped lips and his hat slightly tilted sideways to the left. Her aunt had great taste so she couldn't wait to get the reply from her. She remembered the anticipation was nerve racking as she stared at the three dots on the bottom of her screen indicating she is typing. When the reply finally came in she was surprised to read, "Does he have a job?" She then went into a spill about how looks are not everything and it's about getting to know someone for who they are and falling in love with that. Looks are just a plus.

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Renee ended that conversation early that night. He was fine and the last thing she was thinking about was if he had a job. It only took about a month later to find out that her aunt was right. She knew nothing about him, especially the fact that he had a girlfriend and a baby on the way. When she broke it to her aunt via text, she was so relieved to know that her aunt was so understanding. She did crack a joke, patted herself on the back, and mentioned how she loved being right with the smiley face emoji. She had an amazing smile that was contagious. She then replied that she was glad she could make her smile. Almost like she was face to face with her but the connection between them was so strong that distance could never break their bond.

Her aunt lived out of town about two hours away from her in La Luz. A place Renee used to stay every summer when she was little. As an adult at 32 years old, she doesn't remember it. When she would visit her aunt as an adult, it was either in Alamogordo or in Las Cruces (where she lives) all within the state of New Mexico. Regret creeps up on her as she beats herself up with the questions, 'Did she see her enough? Did she do enough when she was alive? Did her aunt know that she loves her? Although she knew the answer she still felt guilty for no reason. There was never a time that she can recall not telling her she loved her, or a time where she didn't help or reach out to her when she was in town. When she was in the hospital she was by her side as soon as she knew. She was back at square one now, her tears reappeared and she was no longer at peace. Arguing with her conscience she turned off her phone for the night and placed

it back on her night stand. She weeps until her eyes close and she enters into slumber.

The unknown location of a rooster cock-a-doodling wakes her up at 6am. She sits up, stretches her arms as wide as they can go and arches her back. She relaxes her body. She looks at the cell phone on the nightstand. On any other day she would have jumped up out of the bed and grabbed her phone so she can listen to music while she takes a shower. Today, she slowly gets out of bed and bypasses the phone. She takes a shower in silence. The water falls all over her body as she puts her head down and

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watches the water go into the drain. She puts cherry blossom body soap on an exfoliating body sponge and spreads it all over her. The lukewarm water quickly rinses it off her petite body. She grabs a bottle of Pert Plus and puts a dollop in her hand. She puts the bottle down and massages the shampoo into her long brown curly hair then rinses it off. She turns off the shower. She reaches for her towel hanging on the rack and wraps herself. She walks over to the sink area and wipes her hand across the fogged mirror.

She stares at herself and thinks of her aunt. How she always caressed her face and told her she was pretty. A tear runs down her cheek. She turns on the water from the sink and washes her face and tears away. She gets a bath towel next to the sink and dries her face. She looks back in the mirror at her eyes slightly red and still a bit puffy from all the times she cried since last night.

She walks into her bedroom and sits on her bed. Her phone flashing informing her of notifications. She scrolls down and reads all 10 messages she got. Four were from Val, three from her big sister Lynn and three from her mom. She scrolls down to the five missed calls she received from each of them also and two unknown numbers. She didn't respond or call anyone back. She didn't want to be reminded that her favorite aunt, the only one that ever understood her and the bestest friend in the world has died. She turns the phone back off and lays it on the bed. She walks over to her closet and picks out her clothes; a purple fluffy sweater that had a scarf sewn onto it. It is high fashion in her area and it sure does keep her cozy in the winter seasons and man, this November has been the coldest since she can remember. However, she doesn't have the best heater in the world to help either. She swears that thing blows cold air rather than heat some times. She then shuffles through her pant selection. A flow of tears return to her eyes as a flashback appears:

Her, at six years old holding her aunt's hand at Wal-Mart looking for clothes. Although her parents packed her with enough clothes for the summer, her aunt would always spend what little she had to make sure she would buy her at least one outfit. She was a chubby girl when she was young and was

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very uncomfortable in jeans. Her parents either got her jeans that were too tight or too loose to the point that they were falling off. Sometimes she would have to hold the corners of her pants when she walked. Her aunt let go of her hand and picks up a pair of blue sweatpants. She smiles and looks down at her and grabs three more in different colors (black, grey and red). They walk to the register. Renee frowns due to the fact she didn't try them on. All her aunt told her was, "Trust me. They will fit Princess." Her words always brought her comfort. She didn't question it after that. When they got home her aunt let her pick a color and wear it. She picked the blue ones and was amazed how perfectly they fit. She could move around freely. They were so comfortable.

She removes the towel from her body and wipes her eyes and nose with it then throws it into her hamper like she was making a three pointer in basketball. "Make up...lots of makeup." She says pondering how she is going to get through the day. She selects black skinny boot cut jeans; that have purple rhinestones on the back pockets. She goes in her unmentionables and picks out purple boy shorts with the matching bra and a pair of black socks. She gets returns to her closet and gets black knee high boots. She sits on her bed and gets dressed.

Her phone beeps getting her attention. She releases a deep sigh and picks up her phone. She turns it on and sees a message from her aunt. Her whole body feels stiff. She is puzzled, scared out of her mind, and afraid to read the message because she fears someone is pulling her leg in some sick twisted joke. Wanting to put aside the impossibilities, she longs to hear from her, therefore, she disregards the possible consequences. She slowly puts her finger on the *read* button, next to her aunt's name, and opens the message. It's blank. Somehow, she is relieved but then suddenly the three little dots appear on the screen. She takes a deep breath as she reads the message that pops up:

"Don't be afraid Princess. I know it feels like God just ripped your heart from your chest. But I'm still here with you. When you need me send me a message. I always told you nothing can separate us and that includes death."

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All she could do was look at the message. Her fingers wouldn't move to respond to her aunt even though she wanted to. She heard a knock at her front door. She put the phone down and got up slowly, scared to see who would be at the door. She prayed it wouldn't be her aunt. There is only so much she could take. Her hand trembles turning the door knob. She closes her eyes and hides behind the door as she opens it.

She relaxes all her muscles when she hears her cousin Val's voice saying "hello" before entering. She opens her eyes and still double checks to make sure it was really her cousin who walked in and sat on the ottoman in the center of the living room. She looks outside to make sure no one was with her before she closed the door shut and locks it. She walks over to her and sits next to her. They both just sit there for a moment. Not knowing what to say, Val rested her head on Renee's shoulder and finally opens with a story:

"It's funny how life works. As an adult you find yourself treating your parents as if they are the kids. You have rules and expectations of them, scold them and even take care of them the same as you would a child. There were times that I had to feed my mom, help change her and more often than not, scolded her. She was a bit hard headed. I told her to stop smoking. I told her it would be the death of her because of her COPD. When she passed away we were not on speaking terms. She was found lifeless in her home on her couch. There was ashtray on the arm rest with a lit cigarette in it and we are just thankful that she didn't set her house on fire. I didn't make it to the hospital in time to tell her I'm sorry for not talking to her. I'm ashamed for not talking to you either Renee. You were my mom's favorite, there was no denying that. I wasn't really thrilled to share my mother with you. I was tired of her using you as an example of what you're doing that I needed to be doing. You always been a goody two shoes and I was rebellious. I guess what I'm trying to say is sorry for how I treated you. I would give anything to be able to tell my mom 'sorry', but I will never get the chance to".

Renee jumps to her feet making Val almost fall forward since her head was no longer supported by

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Renee's shoulder. Renee runs to her room, grabs the phone, turns it on and types a message to her aunt of everything her cousin said about her. She instantly replied, "All I ever wanted was for my kids to be happy. I smoked for so long that it became apart of me. It's not just something that you can stop and trust me I tried. I would go without it awhile but desperate times call for desperate measures. I used to smoke two packs a day so me not smoking both packs in one day was a success for me. I was 56 years old at death and I loved her just the same as I did when I gave birth to her 33 years ago. I had to play both mommy and daddy that's why I was so hard on both my kids. You know your uncle was more worried about chasing women than his kids but we won't get into that. Take care of my oldest son Jose, you know he is more of the emotional child. Make sure he doesn't do anything stupid. Tell Val that I forgive her and I deserved it. To set the record straight, I didn't have favorites. I loved you all the same."

Renee runs back over to Val and hands her the phone. Val gets the phone from her and looks at an empty text box. "What's this?" she asks concerned. Renee sits back down with her. "Your mom is still alive. She wrote you a message on my phone. You think that she died last night but she is still here in spirit writing to us. Read the message she just sent, she forgives you."

Val stands up straight and quickly walks into Renee's bedroom and grabs her phone charger for her. She walks out and heads to the front door and tells Renee they are leaving now. Renee complained for a good five minutes that she wasn't ready to leave the house. She still needed to throw on some make up and can't forget about breakfast. It's the most important part of the day. She searches the couch for her phone. In one second she could detect that the phone was not on the couch and freaked out. She grabs pillows from the couch and swings them off flying to the floor. She takes out the cushions and they meet the pillows on the ground. She lifts up the couch and bends down to look under it not caring of the distant yells she hears from Val. She didn't hear a word she was saying at that point. She stands up straight and her eyes widen as she realizes her phone is no where on the couch. She falls to her knees

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and screams bloody murder. Val runs over to her waving the phone and charger in the air. She yells were her saying that she had them in the hand. Val knew that Renee wouldn't leave without her phone or charger. She never let her battery go down under 60% or she would freak out. (She had a fear that if her phone died she would lose her aunt and never get her back.) Renee springs up happy as can be grabbing her stuff from Val. She closes her eyes to embrace the moment and holds onto the phone for dear life. she hugs and kissing it. She turns it on and makes sure the thread of her and her aunt's conversation are still there. She turns it off and carefully puts it in her pocket even patting the pocket to her jeans to double check her phone was in there. She follows Val walking out the door. At the doorway she stops and looks back at the mess she made. "I'll fix that later." she mumbles to herself in shame. She locks the bottom lock of her door and closes it after she walks out.

They get in her car and drive to a large brick building. There was no name on it that Renee could see but still it felt very familiar to her. They get out the car and walk inside. It was a long hallway full of closed doors on each side. No windows anywhere. Extremely quiet, they can only hear their footsteps tapping on the plain white tile. They make it to a door identical to the rest of the doors and Val opens it. A large office with only a large desk, three chairs, a bookcase and a plant in the corner. There is a 5'11 white handsome man sitting behind the desk in all white which really brought out his blue eyes and blonde hair. Val sits down and taps the chair next to her for Renee to do the same. She did just that, folding one leg over the other and her arms over them.

Val greets the gentleman with "It's happening again." Renee looks at her and lifts one eyebrow in total confusion. She is quickly unbothered by it as her phone vibrates. She reaches down in her pockets and takes her phone out. She smiles at a message from her aunt with a picture of an doctor + emoji winking. She smiles and turns the phone off. She looks up at the man now sitting on the edge of his desk in front of her. "My name is Dr. Thomas. I'm a pyclogist here at Mesilla Valley Hospital. Your aunt passed away six months ago. The day after you found out your aunt died you wore this outfit

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and have relived this day over and over. You claimed to be able to talk to your aunt. Your family is concerned. We are here to help you. We want to do more testing on you since this has caused many issues.” The doctor says looking into Renee's eyes at her deer in the headlights expression on her face. He glances over at Val and then to his desk. He grabs the single manila folder and opens it up showing her the different reports. “You lost your real estate job that you carried for 8 years. You also attacked and broke up with your boyfriend of two years after he took your phone away to spend time with him. The list goes on” The doctor added as he glances at her poker face before she busting out laughing in disbelief.

He extends his hand to her and she grabs it. He tells her to take a deep breath and before she knew it he stuck her with a needle containing medication. She falls back in her chair asleep. He picks her up around her underarms and from the bottom of her knees like he was a groom and she was his bride. He walks her into a room that just has a bed in it and a small silver tray with a next to it. He places her on top of the bed, takes the phone and charger out of her hand. He places the phone on the tray and gets another cellphone and charger for a Samsung S8 from his pocket and adds it on the tray. He walks out the room and back to Val in his office.

He stands close to her and looks in her eyes. “Today we get the final answer. This isn't healthy for her. She is literally going crazy and we need to seek help before her phone, which connects to the dead, ends up putting her into a patient here at the psych ward. Every day is getting worse for her and we are running out of time. She needs to understand death and learn to accept that her aunt is no longer alive. I removed the charger and just left the phone. The battery is eventually going to die and after that we'll determine what's going to happen. If she can function without her phone, or if we give her another phone, would she be able to communicate with the dead? If she can't function, to what extreme will she go ?” He says firmly at Val with a blank expression on his face handing her the charger. “Thank you Doctor Thomas.” She says getting the charger from him.

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45 minutes later the doctor walks Val over to the observation window to wait for Renee to wake. It wasn't long before Val calls for Doctor Thomas as she notices that Renee is still asleep but her hand is searching for the phone.

Ever since her aunt passed away she had to have the cell phone within reach. The nightstand right next to her bed was the farthest distance she would let it be from her. She had to be able to feel it. Even in the shower, most times, she put the phone in a clear water proof pouch that she put on the rod that held the shower curtain. A week after her aunt died and after they had the burial it was just extreme. Most of her family didn't want to be associated with her because they didn't know how to handle her. Val felt like she owes it to her mom to help Renee. She feels her mom is bringing them back together in a way and as strange as it seems sometimes Val wanted to know what her mother had to say. There have been times where Renee would tell her things that only she and her mom knew about. Like the time she had a headache and was laying on Renee's couch. Renee told her that her mom said to put Vicks Vapor Rub across her head. In the hospital, a previous time, Val experimented with Vicks by putting it on her moms forehead. Whenever they weren't feeling well and no matter what pained them they would tell eachother to put Vicks on it. It was an inside joke between the two.

Doctor Thomas walks up to the window and looks at Renee slowly waking up at this point holding her phone in her hand, eyes opened but still groggy. She turns it on and appears to be reading a message and responding. Both the doctor and Val notice a rush of urgency overcome Renee. She finds out her battery is at 15% percent. She jumps up and searches for an outlet and tries to use the a charger the Samsung S8 to fit her I-phone. When the charger didn't fit she rips open the phone to the S8 and takes out the battery to stick in her I-phone. She realizes that I-phones don't have a removable battery and smashed the phone to the ground breaking it. Val and Dr. Thomas look at eachother in shock and turn back to see Renee ripping the charger open with her teeth and taking out the wiring and sticks them into her I-phone's aux cord port. She did everything she possibly could think of before her battery went

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dead. Looking through the observation window was so tense that Val and Doctor Thomas held hands. Once the phone died, all her activity stopped and she stood in place like a statue. Doctor Thomas rushes into the room and places her back on the bed. She laid there lifeless although he checked her vitals and everything was fine.

Doctor Thomas walks back in the observation room with Val. "Looks like we need to admit her as a resident now but I want to try one more test." He told her sincerely. She was fidgeting and pacing back and forth. All the stress gave her another headache and was physically draining on her body. He laid one hand on her back and gave her a slight tap, "Go home and get some rest. It's Wednesday now so I will send you with an excuse to take the rest of the week off. I will be sending you to a place of your choice to relax and take time for yourself and go to a spa. I will call you after the test results come in. He added walking her out the building. Without a thought she agreed and left with the Doctor's order.

A week later.

Val knocks on Renee's front door bringing her lunch. To her surprise when she came to the door she was wearing the same outfit once again. Maybe it was just a coincidence. Who is to say she can never wear that outfit again. Nevertheless she hoped this wasn't a relapse. Renee let her in and closed the door after her. They sat at her dining table and began to sort out their lunch. Val was relieved that she didn't have her cell phone out. Even while they ate she didn't pull it out once. She knew Doctor Thomas released her with a new I-phone and her charger after she passed the last test. Doctor Thomas had a impersonator come in and act as if she was her aunt and told Renee it was time to let her to let her go so she can rest in peace and that her work was done on Earth. They both cried and embraced each other and this was truly a breakthrough. Renee let her aunt go with closure and said her final goodbyes to her. Val sips on her ice tea to wash her salad down. "It feels good to be home. Your mom never lets me

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down. She told me the lady that came in to act like her looked nothing like her and they could of did a better job. She was insulted. She told me just to play along with it so they can release me. I faked it so perfectly that Dr. Thomas drove me right on home the next day. Aunt Gettie released herself from the cellphone and now she is sitting right next to us. A cellphone can't seperate us.” Renee says with a smile and takes the final bite of her burger. Val was in shock.