



GALLERY 1: THE QUIET ROOM

**Things You Didn't Say Because You
Were Being Polite**

A zine by Sophia
Sharkey

May 2025

1.1 - Paper Napkin, Folded Three Times

Found beside a latte during a 47-minute silence.

he said,

"I love how low-maintenance you are."

I said,

"thank you,"

because setting yourself on fire for someone

doesn't take much effort

once you've done it enough times.

I folded the napkin.

three times.

like a tiny coffin

for every sentence I swallowed

to keep the mood light.

he called the silence "deep."

I was imagining his houseplant blinking twice for help.

he said,

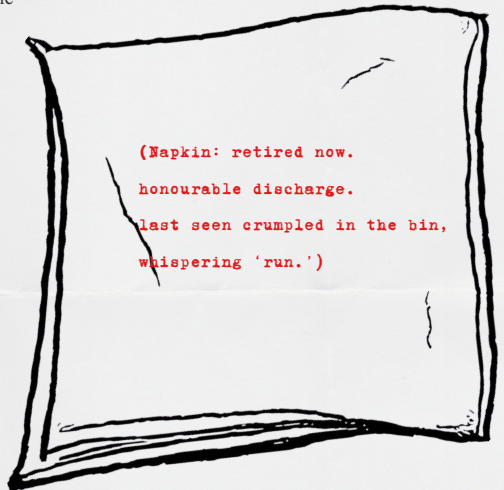
"text me if you want to do this again."

I said,

"maybe,"

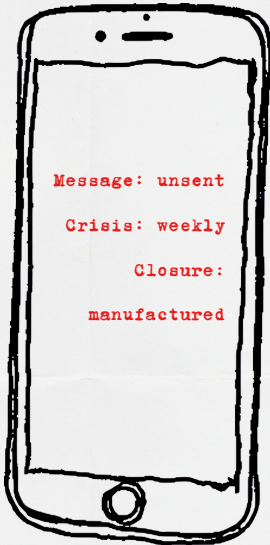
and the napkin whispered

don't.



1.2-Unsent Message, 11 Drafts Deep

Found in Notes, timestamped 2:43a



You typed: "Hey, hope you're okay."
Which meant: I'm spiralling, but casually.
Deleted it.
Typed it again.

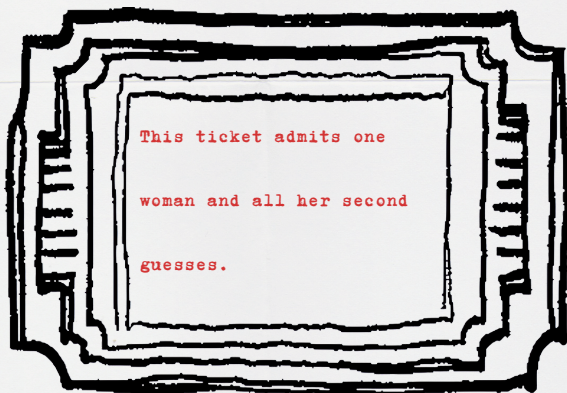
Replaced "okay" with "good."
Backspaced the full stop.
Re-added it for dignity.
Removed it again—too aggressive.

You tried "no hard feelings."
Which is always code for:
I've imagined your funeral
and I look great in black.

You wrote,
"You're not even that special, I was just bored."
Saved that one. For emergencies.

You stared at the blinking cursor
like it was going to hold your hand.
It didn't.

Eventually,
you closed the app,
opened crisps,
and let the message rot
in the Notes graveyard.



1.3 - One-Way Train Ticket (Never Taken)

You bought the ticket to feel brave. Folded it in your pocket like proof you still had a pulse.

A one-way escape to somewhere that didn't smell like him. You even looked up cafés in the new place, imagined your new name, new face, new narrative. And then he said he was "trying." Not sorry, not kind—just trying.

Like a toddler. Like a password you forgot. And that was enough, apparently. So the train left without you, and the ticket curled like a dead leaf in your drawer while you stayed put, trying too. Trying to be nice. Trying to be grateful. Trying to forget you almost had a life that didn't ask you to shrink.

1.4 - Voice Note, Never Played

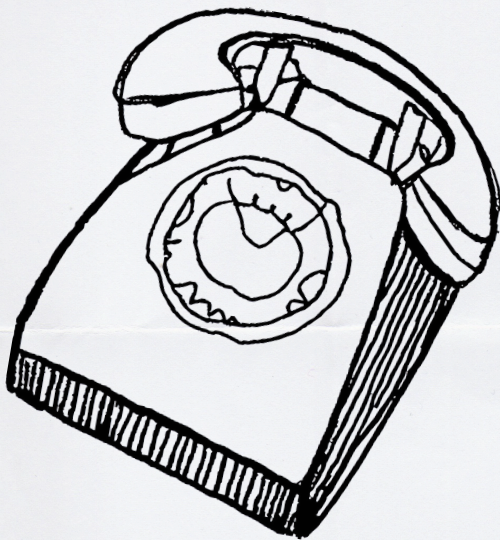
Left a voice note
because typing felt too honest.
Said things like
“no pressure”
and
“just wanted to say this out loud,”
which obviously meant
please reply before I evaporate.

Listened to it back.
You sounded like someone
who cries in Tesco.
Which you are.

Almost re-recorded it—
thought about sounding
warmer, cooler,
less like a woman who Googled
“can heartbreak cause actual brain damage.”

Didn't.
Hit send.
Watched the ticks turn blue
then grey again
like he opened it,
then closed it,
then decided you were a risk to his weekend.

You deleted it the next day
but it still plays in your head
every time
you touch the microphone button
and flinch.



Recorded in a rush.

Never pressed play.

Maybe that was the answer.

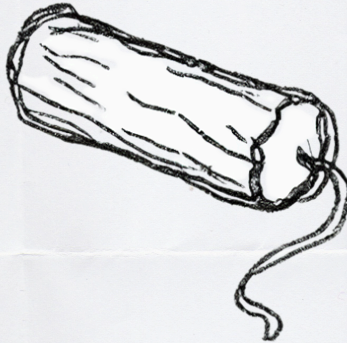
1.5 - Tampon at the Bottom of Your Purse

You were bleeding through a fourth-layer liner
while he explained the economy
like he invented it.

He said, "women are more emotional during their cycle,"
and you considered committing a small, elegant homicide.

There was a tampon in your purse,
wedged between a stale mint
and a receipt for a future you didn't choose.

You could've excused yourself.
Gone to the toilet.
Stuffed it up like a civilised adult.



Instead, you sat there.

Bleeding.

Smiling.

Letting him finish his point
about Jordan fucking Peterson
while your womb staged Les Mis.

Not exactly sacred,
but somehow always there
when everything else is missing.

Because that's what women do.

We nod through discomfort.

Applaud mediocrity.

And quietly bleed for a world
that still thinks pain should be polite.

1.6 - Sock with No Pair

You held it like a bomb
that had already gone off.

Grey. Inside-out.
Still warm enough to offend.

He said it was probably his.
You nodded,
because interrogation sounds
a lot like insecurity
if you do it in a bra.

You could've asked.
You could've said,
"Do you fuck women with taste
or do they all buy socks in six-packs from Tesco?"

But instead
you made a joke.
Something breezy. Something forgettable.
Because god forbid you sound jealous
of a foot.

You left it there.
The sock.
The question.
The entire goddamn you.



Found under his bed.

Definitely not yours.

Possibly not hers either.

1.7 - Pair of Earrings (Worn Only Once)

You spent more on them
than you could justify.
They were meant to say
I know who I am
even if he didn't.

You practised your smile in the mirror
the way people rehearse
bad news.

He said "this is my friend,"
and you blinked
like someone shot the air out of your lungs
without a sound.

You didn't correct him.
You just reached for the bread
like that was the plan all along—
to be unnamed
in nice jewellery.



She bought them to feel seen.

After dinner, you unclipped them
with the care of someone
removing evidence.

He introduced her like she wasn't even there.

Now they sit in your drawer.
Still shining.
Still waiting
for the woman
who thought they'd mean something.

1.8 - Mug with a Crack in the Handle

You told him not to put it in the dishwasher.

He said, "It'll be fine."

Like he said about moving in.

And telling his mum.

And making you cry in the queue at Lidl.

You drank from it anyway—

thumb curved over the fault line

like love could be a brace

if you held still enough.

The handle cracked clean through

a week after he did.

You kept drinking from it,

holding the cup with both hands

like grief needed a ritual

and this was cheaper than therapy.

Now it sits on your shelf.

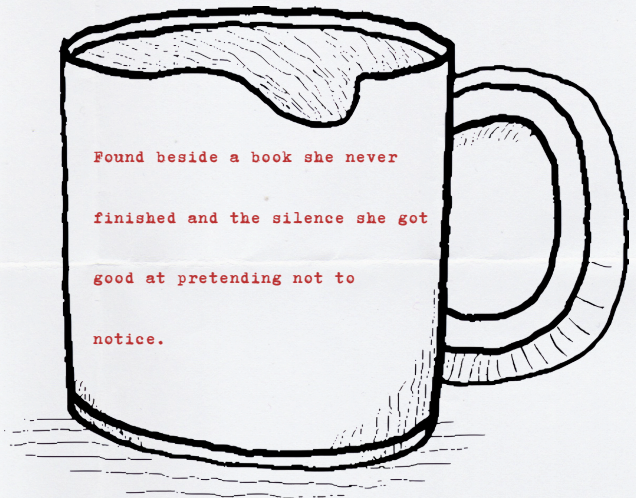
Empty.

Delicate.

Still somehow

the only thing he ever gave you

that didn't lie.



About the Author

Sophia Sharkey started writing seriously when she got seriously ill and needed something to do that wasn't spiralling. This is her first zine. It won't be her last. She writes from beds, park benches, and awkward silences—usually in pyjamas, occasionally by choice.

She likes broken things, well-timed eye rolls, and mugs that are emotionally symbolic.

She once cried in a Pret and decided to call it art.

You're holding the result. More is coming. Probably messier.

Thank you for your support

