# The Call

By: Noah Regan

Hello?

*Cough*

Hello?

Hi, is this Violet Wynder?

Yes, well, yea. I haven't been called by my maiden name in years though. Who's this?

I'm sorry to call out of the blue like this.

It's no problem.

I'm probably the last person you'd ever expect to hear call you.

Possibly—you still haven't told me who this is.

Oh, Christ, I'm sorry. This it Jim—Jim Brooks.

Jim? Oh my God! How are you?

Fine. It's really great to hear your voice. I haven't heard it for a quite a few years—

Forty-one by my count.

Forty-one years? That's incredible! How do you remember so well?

My sister and her husband celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary last year. You remember the wedding, don't you, Jim? You were my *plus one*.

Of course.

We went our separate ways not long after that.

I remember…why did we split up?

Why are you calling, Jim? Is everything alright?

Yea. Everything's fine. I mean, fine… everything is as good as it could be—man, your voice sounds exactly the same—but yea, I'm good. How 'bout you?

It just seems strange is all—I honestly didn't think I'd ever hear from you again. How did you get my number?

I joined that *Facebook* thing that everyone is talking about. I figured I could keep track of my son and see old friends—well, let me back up. I was listening to "She's a Rainbow" by the Stones. You know where I'm going with this don't you?

No, I…I can't say I do, Jim.

Sure you do. I was at that old hole-in-the-wall bar, *Marv's Second Chance* with my old buddy, Rick Myers, ages ago. We were standing at the bar having a beer. The place was dead, only a handful of people were there. We turned to look over at the jukebox once we heard the opening little piano, or whatever—

Ha, ha! Oh, God—

You—you spun around dramatically and looked right at me. You didn't look at anyone else in that place. I remember that for a fact. You turned around and began dancing and walking to me. Then pulling with your finger for me to come out and dance with you. You remember that, don't you, Violet? You were wearing this white blouse with sewn in designs—

My grandma made it for me.

And you were wearing a leather cord necklace with polished sea shells and tight blue jeans.

*Cowrie* shells—I made that while I was on vacation with my parents when I was twelve. How do you remember all that?

That's a night I'll never forget—

You didn't dance with me! At least not right away—

I danced with you!

*Hehehe*, not till I grabbed you by your hand and pulled you out onto the floor!

That's right…why didn't I just step-up and dance with you?

You were a bit of a coward. You and your buddy were standing over at the bar quietly sipping your beers.

I was working up to it.

Yea, right. Why didn't you just come up to talk to me?

I don't know. I wanted to. You noticed that I wasn't approaching you? It seemed like you were having so much fun chatting with all your high-minded art major girlfriends that you'd never have noticed me.

Of course I noticed you! You were constantly looking over at me from behind your beer. I broke away from them to stand over by the jukebox hoping that you'd come say *hello.*

And I didn't. Jesus, I was such a pussy back then.

Don’t worry about it. I did all the heavy lifting for you. I stood there looking at the music for the longest time waiting for you to approach me. When you didn’t I decided to admit defeat and play a song on the jukebox. Then I realized that I didn’t have a quarter so I had to walk back to my friends and ask for some change. I felt so stupid! Then as I walked back to the jukebox I glanced over and you were looking at me again. I finally said *screw it*. Played the first song I spotted that looked any good and made my move.

I’m glad that someone made the first move.

*Hahaha*, someone had to! You obviously weren’t going to!

You looked amazing that night.

You didn’t look too bad yourself…

…

What brings all this up, Jim?

Oh, like I said, I was just listening to some old music and that song came on and I was just thinking about it and thought about you. I’ve thought about you quite a bit over the years, Violet. Wait, that sounds creepy. I don’t think about you a lot. But, certain times you pop in my head.

I know what you mean.

Do I ever come up in your thoughts?

Of course you do. You were a big part of my life for three years.

Do you ever think about it?

Think about what?

Think about what would happen if we stayed together?

…

Violet?

…

Are you still there, Violet?

Yea, I’m still here. I’m just stepping into a different room.

Do you ever—

Of course I’ve thought about it. There was a time that I thought about it daily…hourly.

When?

When my first marriage ended. But Jim, that was over thirty years ago. I was lost for a while, but now I’m happy. I’ve been happy for years.

You’re married now?

Yea. I'm married and have two boys—well I guess they're not boys anymore. James, my oldest from my first marriage is married now and has a boy and a girl of his own.

James?

Just James—he only goes by James.

Oh…

…

So you're a grandma? That's incredible. I can hardly imagine.

Are you a grandpa?

No. My son hates me.

I'm sure he doesn't.

No, he does.

Maybe you should be calling him up and not me.

He wouldn't pick up the phone for me.

…

…

So what have you been up to all these years, Jim?

I retired a couple of years ago.

That sounds nice.

It wasn't my decision. I had a boat and RV dealership. Don't get me wrong, I had some good years in there—years where I was making some great money. If you would have talked to me a dozen years ago you'd hear a different man on the phone. But then business started drying up and after that last recession I finally called it quits and sold off my inventory for a fraction of what it was worth.

I'm sorry to hear that.

Don't be. It was my own fault. My heart wasn't in it the last few years.

At least you can enjoy your free time now.

For now. I won't be able to stay retired. I can't live off my savings for too much longer. I'll have to at least work part time soon.

I'm sorry to hear that.

That's enough about me. What have you been up to for the last four decades?

I worked on a factory floor making aluminum wire for twenty-two years—then I got a receptionist job at the same place. It's a much easier job than working on the floor.

What happened to becoming a stewardess?

*Hahaha*—for one they haven't been called stewardesses in years. And two, I abandoned that nonsense when I became pregnant with James.

What would you have named our child?

Jim!?

I'm sorry I brought it up. Forget about it.

…

He would have been over forty now…if we didn't…if we didn't—

I don't talk about that. I don't think about that. My family doesn't know about it.

I'm sorry I brought it up. It's just that…would we have stayed together if we had the baby?

You can't say that. Jim, we weren't meant to be together. We couldn't spend a weekend together without getting on each other's nerves. We worked best having our own spaces, then getting together.

Well, that's the arrangement I have now. I spend all my time in the basement while my wife is in the living room. We'll go out to eat at *Applebees* and won't say anything to each other the entire time. We look everywhere around us to avoid having to look at each other. We'll sit there in silence, eat our meal pay the check and go home without a word. It's been like that for years. It's not that we get on each other's nerves either. It's just that we have nothing more to say. I wish she would get on my nerves more often. At least I'd feel something for her then. I liked it when you got on my nerves.

Maybe you shouldn't be telling me about this, Jim—

The four hour car ride back after we saw *The Kinks*, you were about ready to kill me! *Hahaha* remember?

Oh God, I was!

But you were laughing. We thought we were miserable sitting in that car together—sick of hearing each other's voice. But I think back as one of my happiest memories.

I'm sure you've had plenty of great memories, Jim.

We camped out that night after the concert. Remember?

*Hahaha*, yea. We had to set up your brother's stupid tent in the dark. We couldn't figure out how to get it put together. We got it somewhat put together then we called it good.

Then what happened?

Then you could only find wet branches and we couldn't get a fire started.

No, after that.

…we decided that we didn't need a fire and made love in the tent.

Repeatedly.

Remember how sunburned we were? Neither of us could lie on our backs.

Of course I do. Violet, we could have had years of that. We could've had thousands of stories like that.

Don't say that.

We could make new stories now.

Jim…

Hear me out—

Is this why you called?

My wife hates me. You loved me.

…

Violet?

I think you need to remember who left who.

I was young and dumb. I thought I had wild oats to sow—

And did you?

No. Not really. I made the wrong choice. I should've married you. It's not too late though. Life—life is split up into three parts the way I see it. You have your youth when you're young, you're carefree—it's when you get educated and discover who you are. Then there is middle age when you find a career, have a family, work every day to pay off your home. But then there's the point that we're just beginning. They can be the best years of our life—

Jim—

Hear me out…I realized that don't have much to show for my life. What is life? Do you ever ask yourself that? Really ask yourself what life is? I have a big brick house that I don't like living in. I have a wife that resents me, a son that won't speak to me. Is that a life? When my time comes there'll be nothing to show that I was ever here at all. All this stuff, it's worthless. It's all meaningless. People will forget me—people will forget both of us after we die. The only proof I was ever here will be worn spots in jeans, creases in the spines of books…smoothed channel buttons on a TV remote. Those are the only things that will let people know I ever existed! All the junk that I've spent a lifetime collecting will one day sit in consignment shops after I'm gone. My wife will move into a condo and this house I've spent my life paying for will be sold to a young couple that will start a family and go through the same motions I did…all we have in life are memories. It's time we start living for today, Violet! It's time we create the life that we were destined to live! We've got a lot of time to make up for, but I'm ready if you are.

Jim?

Yea?

Have you been drinking?

…Yea.

I thought so.

I've thought about this sober though. This isn't the beer talking. I screwed up. I should've stayed with you. I should've married you.

This is all ancient history, Jim.

I did ask once though…remember?

In my old bedroom when you came back with me for Thanksgiving.

Why didn't you say *yes*?

You weren't serious.

Yes, I was!

You didn't have a ring. Jim, were just thinking out loud.

I meant every word of it. If you had said *yes* that night I would have married you. Our lives would be completely different.

I'm happy with my life.

I need to see you, Violet.

Don't be silly.

I'm not being silly. I'm not being anything but sincere.

Jim you're drunk.

I can hear a hesitation in your voice. I know you're considering this. Listen, you don't live that far away. I can take a "fishing trip" and we can meet up.

This is crazy.

Think about how it all used to be. Carefree, it was just you and me and that's all that mattered.

…

We can just meet for coffee. That's innocent enough.

I have kids…grandkids.

…

But…I suppose I could meet up with an old friend.

I'm more than a friend. I'm your past. I *was* the life before the life you have now.

Jim? I think you need to check your *Facebook* profile.

Why's that?

You're status update is my name misspelled multiple times.

What?!

Yea, I think you got the *search* bar and the *status* bar mixed up.

Oh God! What do I do? Oh God! My son's going to see it! My wife! My wife's going to see it!

Now hold on Jim. Are you near a computer?

Yea, one second…alright.

Click on your name on the page…got that?

Yes.

Now you see my name repeated next to your picture?

Oh God! Yea, there it is!

Now just click the little *x's* next to each time you tried to type my name.

…they're going away!

All better now?

Yea, I think I got all of 'em.

*Hmhmhm…hahaha*.

Are you laughing?

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It's just that *hmhmhm*—your right, this is serious—*hahaha*.

All of my friends and family can—*hehehe*—Oh shit! My wife's going to kill me! *Hahaha*! Oh Christ I feel so stupid. *Hahaha*—I can't believe I did that! Oh no, one of my wife's bitchy friends is probably calling her right now! *Hahaha!*

You'd better come up with an excuse right now, Jim.

I thought that it wasn't working when I was typing your name—then poof! Your name came up. *Hahaha*! I'm in deep shit—*hahaha*.

*Hehehe*—our plan is foiled.

I'm sorry. I feel so stupid. This was stupid. I shouldn't have—

I'm glad you called. It's fine. I forgot what you meant to me. I will always keep you in my mind, but I can't have you in my life, you know that?

I know. I should let you go. I think I've done enough damage for an evening.

Next time don't wait forty years to call me, alright?

Sure. I'll talk to 'ya in twenty.

Make sure you're sober next time. By the way, Jim, it hasn't been forty years since I last saw you.

How do you mean?

Quite a few years ago I saw you at a mall in La Crosse. You were stepping off an escalator.

When was this?

Many years ago. You had a beard but I could still recognize you. You were with your wife and son—he looked like a teenager at the time.

Wow, that must have been at least twenty years ago! Why didn't you say *hi*.

Because I was with my family, and you were with yours. I didn't want it to be awkward. It was the right decision.

I see what you mean.

You take care, Jim.

Will do. Goodbye, Violet.

Jim?

Yea?

I love you.

I love you too.