

PRIVATE NUMBER

A Short Story

by

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A man's voice answered. I hung up. For this to work I needed a woman. A young woman--not too smart--maybe eighteen or nineteen. Nobody old and no kids.

Six months ago when I began my little rebellion--that was October of 2002--I only had one phone jack in my room. It was one of those DSL lines for the computer that didn't interfere with regular calls. I even had a phone set I could plug in so I could make calls from my room in private. But being the family line, they weren't so private. Especially with my family.

My folks were okay--masters of the thirty-second conversation. But Kate and Betsy believed the phone existed for the sole purpose of their social calendars. At sixteen, they were the oldest. And being twins, they closed ranks on the rest of us.

I was fourteen, third in the line of succession. My folks told me they wanted a playmate for me--as if any kid over the age of seven would humiliate himself playing with a younger sibling. As such plans usually turn out, they had more girls. Two of them in quick succession, Alexandra, twelve--we call her Alex--and Chloe, eleven. They haven't discovered the potential of the telephone yet, but they will. It's a subroutine in the female puberty firmware.

I suppose I'm lucky it turned out this way. As the only boy, I rated the only private room in a family with more kids than house.