



a short story for English  
reading and speaking

WRONG

NUMBER

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# Introduction

Have you ever dialled the wrong number?

What usually happens if we dial a wrong number?

What if you dialled the wrong number — and you found you know this person?

What if that other person was you?

# Wrong Number

**I thumbed through the channels absent-mindedly, my eyes half-closed.**

The usual rubbish on the TV.

I switched it off.

Why was I even watching it? It made me feel even worse.

I stood, went into the kitchen. But when I got there, I had no idea what I was looking for.

From the window, I got a perfect view of the street below. A cat strutted across the street.

Every window in perfect darkness. No sound apart from the humming in my own ears.

***Not a soul around.***

And me, wide awake in the middle of the night. The third night without sleep.

I pulled the fridge door open. The light inside the fridge cast a blue light on my grey face.

I peered inside the fridge.

A rotting apple and a tub of margarine.

That was all I had.

That was all I ever had. I couldn't remember the last time I had been shopping.

I never kept the fridge stocked with fresh food. I lived on take-outs.

**And anyway, I wasn't hungry. I was bored.**

I was accustomed to not sleeping. I was used to the insomnia. It just made life feel like it was never near perfect.

I was always hovering around the 6/10 mark. Whereas other people might have days that hit nine or even ten. I had no idea how that felt.

I had stopped thinking about the lack of sleep long ago. Eventually, it got to a point where I just passed out.

Usually on the sofa.

***On rarer occasions, the floor.***

One time, on the stairs outside. Luckily, I don't think any of my neighbours saw me. Or they were too polite to say anything.

It didn't matter. As long as I slept. That was good enough.

I wandered back into the tiny living room and slumped on the sofa.

My phone lay in a cloud of dust on the filthy coffee table in

front of me. That was something I could do with all this extra awake time.

I could clean.

But there were a lot of things I could do.

I could shave too.

Write something. Try to finish something to send to the editor.

It might keep him off my back for a couple more weeks if I at least produced a few pages to show him.

***I picked up my phone and flicked it into life.***

I checked it at least 500 times a day. But still felt the urge to see if anyone had bothered to contact me in the last minute and a half.

No messages.

I had sent messages to the people that I thought might be awake at this hour.

I mindlessly scrolled through all my contacts. All the phone numbers I had.

Many of them I could not remember.

Many with the same name.

I had four contacts called Tony. Three called Lily.

No idea who they were or how I knew them.

I scrolled back up to the top, and there was my number. And my name. Just to remind me who I was in case I forgot.

What would happen if I called myself?

Would I get a busy tone?

***A 'this-number-cannot-be-reached' message?***

I clicked it. And pressed the call button.

I had never done this before. A tiny hit of dopamine ran through my mind at the sheer thrill of doing some unknown thing.

**It started ringing.**

I tilted my head and waited.

Whose number was it calling?

Was it ringing my number?

But I couldn't hear my phone ringing.

***How does that work?***

I waited a couple more seconds, then there was a click and someone at the other end spoke.

*Hello?*

The voice on the other end sounded dry and metallic.

It had to be a wrong number.

*Hello. Um, is this 587-3287?*

*Yes. Who's this?*

*I'm sorry I think I might have dialled the wrong number...*

What to say next? I had no idea.

So I used my own name.

*I'm trying to get hold of Jordan. Jordan Made?*

I hated myself for a split second for the sense of doubt in my asking.

There was a deep sigh from the phone, and the sudden exhalation of air like he was clearing his throat.

*Yeah, that's me. Look, who is this?*

I sat up and pressed the phone tight against my ear.

Did he just say he was Jordan Made? How was that possible?

My name. My phone number.

What are the odds of me calling someone and they have the same name as me?

**None.**

*Um — I had no intention of using my own name. I had to think of another name to use. A friend from college. — my name is Alex. Alex Hawkins.*

*I don't know any Alex. What do you want?*

Now his voice had shifted from mild impatience to irritation.



But I didn't want to lose whoever it was — *in reality, Jordan Made* — off the other end. I felt compelled to keep talking to him.

I babbled anything that came into my mind. The words jumbled together in one incoherent mush.

*I was given your number. I'm — I'm an editor of a magazine. It's a new magazine. And we're looking for writers. I was told you're a writer. Is that correct?*

There was a long pause at the other end of the phone. Outside, I could hear a dog barking.

Then I heard Jordan Made take a deep breath.

*Yeah, that's right. I'm a writer.*

I looked around the room for something to drink. An old water bottle that I might have left discarded or the dregs of the coffee that I drank earlier.

But nothing.

My throat was dry as a bone.

*That's um — that's great. Like I said, I'm looking for a writer.*

So...

I shook my head. I sounded stupid. I needed to be more certain of what I wanted.

*Who did you say you were again?*

His question shook me. I scrambled through my thoughts to remember what name I had given him.

*Er... Alex. My name's Alex.*

*And what magazine do you work for?*

Panic ran through my veins.

*It's a new magazine, I said. It's, um... a new publication. We're aiming at the... At the what? My eyes caught the coffee cup I had left there this morning. The coffee market. I need writers who can write copy about —*

*Where did you get this number?* he asked.

Good question. So where did I get it?

*I think someone gave it to me. Or I was given it by an agent... I can't remember.*

The man — **Jordan Made** — cleared his throat.

*Because I never give my number out to people. I just don't. In fact, I seldom call anyone. So who are you really? And how did you get this number?*

I swallowed. My throat was dry as bark.

*There's no reason for alarm. I'm just looking for someone...*

The dog outside barked again.

Silence at the other end of the phone.

*Because I think I know who you really are,* said the caller. *So why don't we stop playing games here?*

*No. I'm not playing games,* I said.

*Yes, you are. You called me. You know who you really called. And I know who you are. You're Jordan Made.*

His voice sounded coarse. Like it was going through some kind of grater. It sounded like a machine.

*I'm — No, you made a mistake,* I said.

*I don't think so, Jordan,* said Jordan. *Your name is Jordan Made. My name is Jordan Made. We're one and the same person.*

***Now why did you call me?***

# Reading Comprehension Questions

What is the main character doing at the beginning of the story?

Where does he go next? Does he know why he goes there?

What does he see from the window?

Why is he awake? How long has he been awake?

What does he see in the fridge?

Is the fridge ever full of food?

What does the main character usually eat?

Where does he usually sleep?

What does the main character do for work?

How many times does he look at his phone?

What does he decide to do with his phone?

Does anyone answer the phone?

Who does the main character say he is trying to call?

What is the main character's name?

What is the second character's name?

What name does the main character give to the man on the phone?

What reason does the main character give for calling the man

on the phone?

Does the main character become nervous when talking to the man?

Who does the man say he is? And who does he say the main character is?

Who is who in this story?



# Essential Vocabulary

Thumbed	Panic	Machine
Absent-mindedly	Veins	Dust
Rubbish	Alarm	Fridge
Switched	Swallowed	Margarine
Insomnia	Bark	Shopping
Slumped	Silence	Take-outs
Editor	Mistake	Sleep
Messages	Editor	Sofa
Contacts	Magazine	Stairs
Dopamine	Publication	Neighbours
Exhalation	Market	Clean
Irritation	Agent	Shave
Babbled	Games	Writer
Compelled	Caller	Number
Incoherent	Coarse	Name
Dregs	Grater	Clicked

## Exercise

There may be a lot of new or unfamiliar vocabulary to you in the story. This is the perfect time to get to know these new and

strange words and phrases.

Write down all the new words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in a dictionary or online and write down the meaning next to the word or phrase.

It should look something like this:

**To Thumb** – *to turn the pages of a book or to flick through images or details on a smartphone.*

**Channel** – *a TV station that broadcasts new or shows on a certain theme.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

***I thumbed through the pictures on my phone.***

***There are never any new movies on the movie channel on TV.***

If you do this correctly, it will help you learn many new words and phrases. This will build your English vocabulary and writing down all the words and phrases, and making sentences of your own, will all help you to remember all of this new vocabulary.

## Discussion Questions

In your own words, say what happens in this story.

Does this man call himself? And he answers the phone at the other end?

Explain how this could happen — What explanation is there for this?

Do you think the man's lack of sleep could be a problem for him? How?

Try to imagine this man's life...

Do you think he has any friends?

Does he have a family? And if so, does he see them regularly?

What effects can lack of sleep have on a person's mind?

Do you think the narrator of the story imagined all of this?

What is the longest period you have gone without sleep?

How did you feel?

How important is sleep to us?

How many hours of sleep do you usually get every night? Is this enough?

Have you ever imagined something to be totally real when it was not?

What happened?

What is a doppelgänger?

Do you think doppelgängers really exist?

Have you ever met someone that looks like you?

Have you ever met someone with the exact same name as you?

Did this person resemble you in any way? Or were they completely different?

# Role Play

**This is a role play activity.**

There are two characters in the role play.

**Jordan** — the man in the story above

**A Doctor** — a doctor that wants to help Jordan with his insomnia

## The Situation

Jordan talks to a doctor about his insomnia. He has not slept well for many days and he is becoming worried about it.

The doctor asks him what happens at night, and what he usually does.

Jordan tells the doctor about the phone call.

What advice does the doctor give Jordan?

Does Jordan accept the advice?

Maybe he thinks he really does have a doppelgänger...

Work in pairs and choose a character to play in the role play.

Take some time to prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the rest of the class.



# Writing

**This is a writing exercise.**

Write about a time when you could not sleep.

- ***What was the reason for you not sleeping?***
- ***How long did you not sleep for?***
- ***How did you resolve it? Or did it resolve itself?***
- ***Did you have any adverse effects from not sleeping?***

When you have finished your writing exercise, read it out loud in class.

**Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.**

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