

Hello, Operator

The man in the black suit locked the door to his office and sat down in the chair across from the woman. She fidgeted with her skirt, rubbing the material between her fingers, then eventually smoothing it out.

“Tell me what happened,” the man whispered, taking a sip from his cup of coffee.

“I received a call from a distressed woman last night,” recounted the woman, her words becoming quicker and more difficult to understand, “She said she was calling from a phone booth downtown, and-”

“You’re rushing your words. Calm down, Miss. Let’s try it again, nice and slow. You may restart when you are ready,” the man offered.

The woman took a deep breath and began her report again.

The evening was cold and dreary. The operator watched as rain droplets slowly rolled down the windows of her office. There were few calls for her nowadays, but the occasional one still came in. The clock ticked, as if as impatient for a call as the operator was. She felt almost entitled to a call due to being at her job so late on a Friday. Alas, nothing came. In a way, that was to be expected.

Out of boredom, the operator's mind began to wander, questioning the scenario it found itself trapped in. Would she be in that much trouble from her boss if she left early? Even if she was fired, it wouldn't make much of a difference. A hundred years ago, before cell phones, maybe. People knew how to reach each other better now, with the added feature of the internet in most phones giving callers the ability to clear up any last-minute confusion before making calls. There were fewer and fewer operators. She was the last one at this company, and had the feeling that once the newest cell phone released in a month, she would be packing to leave for another job. She could barely pay her apartment rent as it was, and that would be the final nail in the coffin.

It was better to start a new resume early, just in the event of the worst happening. The operator opened her personal computer, entering her passcode. She pulled up an old document that contained her previous resume. It was a sight for sore eyes, despite being outdated by ten years. She sighed, exhausted. At least she only had one thing to add to her list of past work experiences.

A sound came through the old switchboard. The company the operator worked at didn't have enough money to get more recent technology, so they were forced to use such machinery. The operator snapped herself out of working on her resume and answered the call.

“Hello, operator?” called a panicked voice.

“Hello, how can I help you?” the operator responded with false cheer.

“I’m calling from a phone booth,” came the woman’s hushed tone once more, “I need help.”

“Who can I help you call?” the operator responded.

“No, I don’t think you understand.”

The operator paused, the sound of the pouring rain the only thing filling their ears for a moment. What was going on?

“Um, alright. What would you like me to do for you?” the operator responded, growing concerned.

“Please. I need you to listen to me. I’m being followed, and I don’t know if I have much time.”

If something hadn’t been off before, the operator was downright suspicious now. Nobody called her company’s operating service anymore. Even if one was to, it certainly wasn’t to report a stalker. That was a job for emergency services, not her. Naturally, she could refer the distressed woman to them, but something in her gut wouldn’t let her do so.

“Alright. What seems to be the problem?” the operator started, nervous.

“I’m being followed. I don’t know by who, or why they’re following me. But when I turned around, they didn’t look right. They looked like a person, but their eyes were partially sunken into their skull. Their arms were way too long, and their legs bent backwards when they ran. I don’t know what the heck that thing was, but I’m trying my best to hide. I need you to remember the information I told you. Otherwise, I don’t think this thing will ever be caught.”

The operator was stunned. What the woman described couldn’t be real, but nobody was a good enough actor to pull off a prank like this. The urgency in her voice was real.

“Maybe you saw a regular person unclearly? You could have mistaken a jogger for something like that easily,” the operator suggested, trying to calm her own nerves rather than those of the caller.

“I know what I saw. That thing wasn’t human.”

“Ma’am, it’s late. I seriously doubt that you saw a monster. I’m sure you just saw something in your peripherals and couldn’t quite figure out what it was.”

The woman began to sound even more distressed. “I saw this thing, head on. It’s still following me. I’m sure of it.”

“Listen, Ma’am, if it makes you feel better, I can transfer your call to emergency services, and they can sort out your stalker problem for you. Would you like me to do that?”

“You don’t understand!” the woman screamed.

“Ma’am, I’m going to need you to calm down-” started the operator.

“It’s here, it’s here! I can hear it!” the called cried out, the sound ringing in the operator’s ears. The rain seemed to get louder.

“Ma’am, I can assure you that nothing is going to happen-”

A bloodcurdling scream emitted from the other end of the line, followed by the sound of tearing flesh. The operator heard a loud thud. Static crackled through the switchboard. Suddenly, a voice that didn’t even seem to try to sound human poured through the line.

“Hello, operator.”