

The story centers around *Julie Clarke*, a high school senior who is devastated by the sudden death of her boyfriend, *Sam*. Julie had been making plans for her future with Sam, and his death leaves her in an overwhelming state of despair. She struggles with her guilt, regret, and the emptiness left behind by his absence. In an act of desperation, she dials Sam's phone one last time, only to be shocked when he picks up. Somehow, she is able to communicate with him from beyond the grave.

This extraordinary and surreal connection allows Julie to say the goodbyes she never got to, but as they continue to talk, it also keeps her from letting go. Torn between her love for Sam and the need to move forward, Julie faces the complex journey of finding closure.

Themes:

The novel explores several key themes:

- **Grief and Loss:** Julie's journey mirrors the experiences of anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one. Thao captures the messiness of grief—the denial, the anger, and the eventual acceptance that must come with time.
- **Letting Go vs. Holding On:** Julie's magical phone connection with Sam becomes a symbol of the difficult choice between holding on to the past and learning to let go. It's about finding balance between cherishing memories and continuing with life.
- **Love and Memories:** Even though Sam is gone, Julie's love for him lingers through the memories they shared. This story demonstrates how the people we love continue to live on through our recollections and emotions.

Reception:

You've Reached Sam has been praised for its tender approach to difficult emotions. Readers find themselves pulled into Julie's world, feeling both the weight of her sadness and the beauty of her fleeting conversations with Sam. The novel's emotional depth, along with its relatable portrayal of loss, makes it a tear-jerker that resonates with young adults and anyone who has lost someone close.

Style and Writing:

Dustin Thao's writing is simple yet heartfelt. He paints an intimate picture of grief without becoming too heavy, allowing space for hope and lightness. The blend of reality and the magical phone calls adds a touch of surrealism that makes the novel stand out among other grief-centered YA books.

Conclusion:

In essence, *You've Reached Sam* is not just a story about loss, but also about love, hope, and healing. It gently reminds readers that while it's painful to let go, the people we love never truly leave us.