

THE SCIENCE OF FAITH

By **Sharkchild**

On the softest of days, when the splinters of time bowed to uncanny sounds, I heard the ringing. It came from some region just closer than what could be called distant. As if drifting on a river of sustaining sound, the ringing reached my ears, tickling them like the elegant prose of a poem. When I heard it, and focused upon it, it seemed to never end. It was not until it was drowned by the power of some other noise, or until I was distracted by some other task, that the ringing conveniently vanished. Though I would lose its mysterious touch, it always came again.

What I heard was the ringing of a rotary dial telephone. In its essence, to me, that fact was quite strange. In a world of vast technological advancement, this ancient piece of equipment stood its ground, undaunted. But even more peculiarly, the phone was never answered. Its function was carried out—to ring but no one was there to act in response. What vacant hole of distaste did the thing occupy? That was just what I desired to find out.

The apartment I dwelled within lingered upon a back alley. On the other side of this alley were several rundown, low-trafficked businesses, many of which seemed to be indefinitely shut down and left to the art of unkind hands. When I heard the ringing, it was from this vicinity that it originated.

Once I made my decision to find the source, I listened for many days—as time allowed—for the sweet ring of the phone. I stood at the foot of my bed, staring out into the city through the window above it. Daylight and moonlight beamed upon me, coating my flesh and clothing, and my innermost thoughts. I longed to seek out the origins of the ringing—to follow its signature to the hand of its estranged creator. But, it would not sound when I so longed for it to. It could not be sought in demand; only in the unintentional randomness of the day-to-day would the ringing ever manifest.

The ringing did finally come again, and it did so in the middle of the night, piercing through the matter of unliving things, finding its way to my anxious, waiting ears. I sat straight up in bed when the tune laced about me, and not a moment later, I was dressed and ready to follow its allure.

As I made my way outside, I almost lost the clandestine melody, but I quickly scrambled to the alley and recovered its trail. While listening as intently as a child to the new sounds of its surroundings, I followed the ringing for several minutes, pinpointing its direction and seeking the best path to reach it.

Before long, I was at the back entrance of an abrasive, rundown motel called Moonshield Motel. There were about a dozen rooms, and no more. The walls of the building looked damp and moldy and the planters surrounding the building held nothing but brown. Two cars were parked at different ends of the parking lot. A small light illuminated the reception office, but other than that, everything was almost immaculately dark.

I walked to each room and placed my ear against their doors, listening for the familiar sound to burn brighter from within, but none harbored the proper intensity of evidence. The ringing was not birthed from within the motel; rather, as I placed my head closer to the earth, I found that it came from below. And sure enough—to aid in my irregular venture—there rested a manhole not

far from my enlightened location, granting me the exercise of my whimsical desire.

After finding a tool necessary to open the sewer entrance, I left the world above and danced into the realm below, frolicking foolishly after the ringing that harnessed the supremacy of mystery and harassed the strength of my curiosity.

My breathing shortened as I took each step further down the irreverent rungs of the portal's ladder. I grew cold while the chill of the ladder's metal transferred through my hands and into my body, but before I could sulk within it, my feet splashed upon a lightly puddle-strewn floor. I was instantly shrouded in complete blackness.

I listened and the ringing was still there, louder than ever. How, I thought to myself, could this ringing have ever reached me? It was a profound irony to hear a sound from so strange a distance.

I followed it down a couple of corridors and turns while walking tightly against the wall with the navigation of my hands. Then, before I knew it, I was upon the gentle machine that beckoned me forth! The telephone rested upon a short stool within a crevice cut into the wall. I was horrified to feel about blindly with my hands, but I had no other choice. From the device extended a phone line up into a hole on the ceiling. I imagined it went to the motel, but I did not plot in my mind that significant of a surface-to-sewer comparison to be entirely sure.

On the next ring of the phone, I picked up the receiver rashly, as if it would not ever ring again. I placed the smooth plastic upon my ear and spoke desperately into it. All the while, my head radiated with nervous glee.

"Hello," I said.

There was a brief pause.

"Hello," a voice replied in a kaleidoscope of tones.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"The father of many, the brother of few."

"What is the purpose of this phone, and calling it?" I asked as yet another question.

"So someone would answer it," responded the voice.

"But why down here?"

"Because it's not easy to get to and it's not easy to escape. But please fear not. You are not being trapped; it's for reasons much grander than tricks and games. All you need to do is dial those numbers that are dear to your heart."

"What?"

"On the phone, dial those numbers that fill your memories and stain your thoughts."

"I don't get it."

"You don't need to—just do as I say."

"But I can't see."

"Count the holes."

After a couple moments, and confused thoughts, I dialed a series of numbers that had hung to my life rather vigorously.

"Oh, good," the multifarious voice responded.

"What happened?"

"More than you ever knew could. What do you believe in more: what you hear or what you see?"

“What I see.”

“Then see!”

As if the sewer was rigged with electricity, light extended everywhere. I saw the phone. I saw the stool. And I saw the man without a shirt covered in tattoos of numbers standing adjacent to me. I started intensely backwards, dropped the phone, and hit my head on the wall behind me.

“Find the numbers,” he said.

“Which numbers?” I stuttered, terrified of the stranger’s sudden appearance.

“Your numbers.”

Row after row of tiny numbers consumed the man, forming a mass of millions of infinite sequences. They lined his arms, his chest, his shoulders, and even his face. I was too frightened to run.

“Find the numbers,” the man repeated.

I looked over the man’s body nervously for more than an hour before coming across a diagonal line of those numbers I dialed into the phone.

“There,” I said, pointing to each of the numbers in their correct order on the man’s neck.

“Remember your place,” the man returned.

The lights vanished instantly after his words, and the phone never rang again.