

over the last week the steel has crumbled to dust. At this moment I'm more afraid than I've ever been in my life. Help me, please, help me. I beg you to help me. Since God's out of the office, please put Jesus on the line."

A moment later a female voice came on the phone. She said, "I assure you, Mr. Rains, I have heard and recorded everything you have said and you have touched my heart deeply. I'm positive that Jesus would like to speak with you.

With a quiver in his voice Jack said, "Thank you."

"Oh, you're quite welcome. But I'm sorry to say this, but if God's gone for the day that means that both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are out of pocket, too. Remember when you were 10 years old and enrolled in Sunday School at Foster Baptist Church, your Sunday school teacher, Mrs. J. E. Goodman, explained to you the Holy Trinity. She's that same fine Christian woman who wrote that lovely inscription in the Bible she gave you when you were elevated from primary to secondary Sunday School. Now tell me you don't recall her informing you that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are actually one and the same. That means where God goes so go the other two."

"Yes," Jack said. "I remember and I still have the Bible, someplace."

She said, "If you would like to leave a message for God, I will connect you to his voicemail, or I will be happy to have your confession typed up and forwarded to him for his perusal. But I must caution you that the typing pool is swamped with work and it may take as long as eighteen months to get done. And then there's the review process. First, it has to be reviewed by a committee chaired by Mary Magdalene and made up of selected apostles, angels, and other notables. After that comes another committee. It is the committee of the resurrected chaired by Moses. I'm not supposed to do this, but I'll make a note to have Mrs. Goodman placed on your review committee. If you clear that hurdle your file will be forwarded by mail to God for action. Unfortunately that resurrection review process can take up to three years, maybe longer, depending on the availability of committee members. If that's not satisfactory then I'll be happy to return you to the main menu or transfer you to a representative for further spiritual counseling."

Jack was startled by her knowledge of his past life. He had given out only a minuscule amount of information, but she knew personal things about him that people who had known him for years didn't know. He swallowed hard. In a child-like voice he said, "This is a dire emergency—representative please."

She said, "Have a blessed day."

He heard three clicks, then silence. The silence grew to one minute, then two minutes. Jack looked at the phone and the screen was black. His mood darkened. He placed the phone to his ear and said, "Hello, hello, anybody there?"

Total silence.

He raised his voice three octaves, which made him sound like a castrated tenor. "Can you hear me? Hello. Hello."

He dropped his gaze to the LED screen once again; it was still pitch black. He leaned back his head and roared, "Holy shit!"

He punched the redial icon. He gave it the kind of punch he had used when he thumped his attorney in the chest and threatened to kill him after the verdict was read. All he got from his attorney was a bill. All he got when he punched the cell phone was a busy signal.

He tried again; still busy.

He tried once more; again a busy signal.

Now he was beyond furious; rage engulfed him. His face hardened, his jaw clenched. He stood up and hurled a string of profanities before kicking the coffee table. The kick drove the court's electronic monitoring bracelet into his ankle. He expelled a savage, inhuman cry.

He shoved the phone into his pocket. With shoulders hunched like an old man, he hobbled to the window, his head shaking a mouth full of gritting teeth. At the window he cursed profusely at the darkness outside. He wanted to strike the window with his fist and shatter it and toss the cell phone out into the night.

The rain had stopped and the stars were shining, but the moon was nowhere in sight. It had moved out of sight in its nightly journey across the sky. He felt helpless, more alone than ever before. He pressed his forehead to the glass to cool his fiery headache, standing dead still for almost fifteen minutes looking down at the wet street, his mind spinning out of control. He finally pulled himself together and pushed himself away from the window. With a few tottering steps he returned to the chair and flopped down.

He grabbed the bottle from the coffee table and pulled it to his lips. He tilted his head back. The bottle, like his life, was empty. He hurled the bottle across the room. It hit the TV with a bang, shattering the screen into a spider web of cracks. He glanced down at the Bible, and then the handgun.

He sighed and was about to give up when he realized there was another possibility. Perhaps he could call an associate, a man of his own kind, regarding his current state of affairs and ask him why this was happening to him and what he should do about it. But he couldn't remember his associate's phone number.

He removed his cell phone from his pocket, holding it in the palm of his hand as if weighing it on the scales of introspection and self-justice. He picked up the handgun and released the safety. Then he wept like a baby, hot tears rolling down his cheeks.

A few minutes later he wiped his eyes with the palm of one hand. Holding the handgun with the other hand he opened the Bible with the tip of the barrel. Using the tip of the barrel he flipped through the onion-skin pages until he came to the last book in the New Testament. He removed his readers from his shirt pocket and placed them on his nose. Still using the barrel as a finger he slowly turned the pages until he found what he was looking for. And then he read aloud the sacred words of God in Chapter 13, Verse 18 several times. Buried in the text was the phone number he was looking for.

Jack pressed one key on the cell phone three times, then lifted the phone to his ear. It rang only once, and then a raspy voice came on the line. "Hello, Schlep, I've been expecting your call," followed by that familiar growl.

Censorship, Yesterday and Today

This year marks the centenary of the death of Anthony Comstock (1844–1915), a United States postal inspector and politician dedicated to enforcing Victorian morality in the public square. Founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, Comstock influenced Congress to pass the Comstock Law, prohibiting the delivery by U.S. mail, or by other means, of "obscene, lewd, or lascivious" material, including information about abortion, contraception, and venereal disease. In 1905 George Bernard Shaw coined the term "Comstockery": censorship. For more, see "For Our Free Speech, We Have Censors to Thank," by Amy Werbel, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Sep 17, 2015.