

Colyn Rogers

Tinnitus

By Colyn Rogers

It was an old and cheap motel room with old and cheap décor.

The wallpaper curled in on itself, the sheets on the leftmost bed bore a dark brown stain. The television played static. The radio fell silent. The AC unit was unplugged. The lights above the beds dangled, the wires taut.

On the nightstand between the two beds, there sat an old rotary phone. The numbers long since faded, and the color changed from a bright yellow to an ugly, muted taupe. It rang, the high-pitched noise echoed in the small room.

Reid pulled at the brown-stained blond hair on the sides of his head and covered his ears with his hands. He sat in an old, creaky desk chair, rocking back and forth in his seat. His legs bounced, and he shuddered. “Elliot, it’s happening again,” Reid said. “Do something!”

Elliot sat up in the bed on the left side of the phone. The left side of his shirt was stained a dark brown. “Calm down, Reid, or the neighbors will hear you,” Elliot said. “Is that something you want?”

“No, I—I just want it to stop,” Reid said.

The phone rang louder.

Reid leaned over to the left side of the chair in pain and fell over. His left shoulder hit the ground hard.

Elliot shrugged, letting out a sigh. “There’s an easy way to make it stop, Reid,” Elliot said. “Answer the phone.”

It kept ringing.

“Why would I want to do that?”

“To end this,” Elliot said.

The ringing grew louder.

Reid covered his ears with his hands again. He pulled his hands away from his ears, wiping them on the carpet. Blood stained the carpet.

“Elliot, it’s getting worse,” Reid said.

“Then make it stop, Reid,” Elliot said.

“No,” Reid said. “You just want to turn me in!” He slammed his fist on the bloody carpet.

Reid scrambled to his feet, his legs shaking. He held his right hand to his right ear. He maneuvered over to the bed on the right side of the phone.

“You should listen to me, Reid,” Elliot said. He stood up from the bed, standing next to the phone.

The phone rang louder.

The lightbulbs shattered.

The light from the television flickered, bathing the room in a dim, grey light, and the phone kept ringing.

“Answer the phone, Reid,”

“This is all your fault, Elliot,” Reid said. “If it wasn’t for you, it wouldn’t be ringing.”

“My fault?” Elliot asked. “You brought us here, Reid.”

“Yes, but—”

“But nothing!” Elliot said. “This is your fault, not mine.”

“Elliot, we needed a place to go,” Reid said. “They were coming for us, so I took us somewhere safe!”

“You brought us to a cheap motel on the other side of town,” Elliot said. “Is that your idea of safe?”

“Yes, but you stole from them, Elliot,” His hands stopped shaking. “That was your plan.”

“Reid—”

The ringing grew louder and sharper.

“No more, Elliot,” Reid said. “I can’t take it anymore.”

“Then answer it,” Elliot said. He stood a few feet from the ringing phone.

Reid turned toward Elliot and the phone. His hands trembled. Sweat beaded on his brow, blood dripped from his ears. His lips curled into a grin. Reid sprinted and leapt at Elliot, tackling him into the old nightstand. It broke upon impact, bringing the two of them clattering to the floor alongside the ringing phone. “Why don’t you answer it?” Reid asked. “Don’t you hear it?” His hands gripped Elliot’s throat.

The ringing reached an unbearable level. Reid clasped his hands over his bloody ears, an agonized scream escaped his lips.

“Reid,” Elliot said. “You’re going deaf.”

“Then why, Elliot,” Reid said. “Why can I still hear you?”

Reid reached for the phone’s handset. He gripped it in his bloodied fingers.

“Reid, wait—” Elliot said.

Reid pulled the phone from the wall, ripping and tearing the wires. He smashed the phone's base over Elliot's head. Half of it broke into hundreds of tiny shards of plastic, scattered on the floor. He threw the rest of the base at the wall, leaving a dent in the plaster.

Reid let Elliot slump to the floor. He got to his knees and crawled into his own bed. He covered himself with blankets, rested his head on the pillow, and closed his eyes.

The handset laid against Elliot's body, disconnected from the rest of the phone's base.

Reid sighed.

The handset rang.

END