

*"Hello? Mama? ... Mama?"*

*Jon-Jon held his breath and wished and strained to hear his mother's voice float through the wires and into his ear.*

*"Mama?"*

*And the only reply was his word's cold, dead echo off the mouthpiece and back onto his face.*

*Jon-Jon dropped the receiver and watched it as it swung crazily; twice striking the glass walls of the phone booth before hanging like some odd, black bug.*

*He shook his head and sighed.*

*"Mama's not in there," said Jon-Jon. Then he shuffled down the empty street toward the next pay phone.*

*As he passed Mr. Denny's drug store, a movement through the plate glass yanked a dry scream from his throat. Jon-Jon cringed, whimpering, against the brick front of the building.*

It was following him and he knew it. He could feel its cold stare penetrate him like the serrated edge of a sharp knife. He could feel its presence and deep down inside he knew that there was no escape.

Jon-Jon rubbed the tears from his eyes and then bolted for the next phone booth.

"Don't look back," he thought to himself as he ran down the street.

Panting, Jon-Jon grabbed the phone from the cradle inside the next small, red phone booth.

"Mama?"

As he listened hard through the static and white noise that flowed from the ear piece like gentle lapping waves, Jon-Jon leaned forward and looked down the street. As far as he could see, clear to the horizon, were the little red phone booths. Thousands of them. Perfectly lined up. Each one a duplicate of the one prior. And he knew that she could be in any one of them.

Again there was movement and again the receiver dropped from his hand and swung and struck the stained glass panels inside the wooden phone booth. Tears welled in his eyes and began to cloud his vision. He wanted to scream. Wanted to yell as loud as he could, but all he could do was whimper. He was trembling and now Jon-Jon felt sick and dizzy.

He clamped his eyes tightly together and tried to focus. He knew he had to find her. Find her first or there'd be no escape.

Jon-Jon forced himself to keep moving and forced himself to ignore what was following him. He knew that it didn't matter anyway if he couldn't find her.

Over and over . . . another phone . . . the static.

Jon-Jon stood at the open door to the next phone booth, still cradling the receiver in his hand.

"Mama . . ."

The word was barely audible as it cracked and hung in the back of his throat. Jon-Jon started to drop the phone but it clung to his half open fingertips like a cigarette hanging from someone's pasty lower lip.

Across the street, a dark figure emerged from the shadows and Jon-Jon screamed a horrible dark scream and took off running in a wild panic. He no longer could stop at every booth and the fear grew inside of him. Had he already passed the one that imprisoned her?

Jon-Jon glanced back over his shoulder just in time to see the dark mass step behind one of the neatly lined up booths. Then he leaned forward onto his knees trying desperately to fill his lungs with air. His mouth was dry as sand and the back of his throat tasted like blood.

Suddenly, it was out from behind the booth and within two steps it was on him. It engulfed him like a huge wet blanket and Jon-Jon hit the ground hard. He couldn't breathe and the last sensation he could feel was cold and greasy.

When he awoke, he felt paralyzed, but as he returned to reality, he could sense that he was strapped down. Strapped to a large wooden table. He was in the center of a concrete room and he could hear the sound of dripping water in the distance. The air was filled with the smell of moist rot and it was thick, almost to the point of gagging.

He shook his head hard, trying to comprehend what he was seeing. The ceiling looked like badly poured concrete. In the center was a single light bulb shimmering through the darkness. Around the walls, metal rings were placed at about two foot intervals. But what made Jon-Jon's heart pound painfully in his chest as if it were going to burst out on its own, was the red phone booth on the wall directly at the end of his feet.

Jon-Jon arched his back and convulsed against the restraints but it was no use. The monstrous leather straps held him firm.

As his body relaxed, Jon-Jon began to sob. And as he did, he heard a sound from within the room.

Something odd. First a click and then a buzz.

Jon-Jon sniffled, took two quick gulps of air and then leaned his head forward as far as he could to listen.

The thin crackling sound was coming from the phone booth.

“Jon-Jon? Jon-Jon, it’s Mama . . .”