**Your Call is Important to You**

Doug Jacquier

 The reception area of the Youusinfinity Global Phone Corporation was vast. Its ornate vaulted ceiling dome had been retained from the head office of a major bank, courtesy of a heritage order. Behind the ornate façade sat a soaring glass office tower, serviced by a mass of lifts that constantly dinged as they loaded or emptied smartly dressed minions and visitors.

 The counter that had once housed a myriad of bank tellers was poorly signed, and it took me some time to locate a window with ‘Enquiries’ written above it in copperplate gold lettering. A young man with half his head shaved and the hirsute half gelled into a peak, dressed in a black shirt buttoned to the collar but no tie, sat with his eyes fixed on the screen in front of him. He ignored my presence until I spoke.

 “I wish to lodge a complaint,” I ventured politely.

 The young man didn’t look up. He paused long enough to indicate that what was on his screen was inestimably more important than me before saying “Far queue.”

 I was about to express my outrage until I saw that he was gesturing vaguely to his right, where a long line snaked away from a similar window marked ‘Complaints.’

 Still fuming from the thinly disguised expression of contempt, I joined the line. Thirty minutes passed with no sign of the line progressing. An old, stooped man, with hair sprouting wildly from the parts of his ears not engulfed with hearing aids, was in front of me and I asked how long he’d been waiting. He half-turned his stiff neck and he mumbled, “Since yesterday.”

 He forestalled my next question with, “If they close before you get to the counter, they give you a number to hold your place for the next day.” He turned his hips with some difficulty, looked me up and down and asked, “Where’s your form?”

 “I didn’t know I had to have a form.”

 He looked at me as if he had just met the village idiot. “If you haven’t written down what your complaint is about, how do you expect them to address it? They haven’t got time to write it down for you.” He made that *tuh* sound that old people do that equates to rolling their eyes.

 I looked around for where the forms might be, and he pointed to a line at the opposite side of the cavernous room. “You have to line up for one. Otherwise, people come in and grab a handful to use as toilet paper and run off.”

 I was beginning to suspect he was pulling my leg to amuse himself while he waited, so I said “What about Security? Surely, they could stop them.”

 But then I noticed the once ubiquitous security guards in office buildings were nowhere to be seen. With an ‘I-told-you-so’ smirk he said, “Saves money. Bullet-proof glass is cheaper and it doesn’t call in sick.”

 “Can you hold my place in line while I get a form?”

 “You’re kidding? Who’s going to take any notice of me?”

 I scurried over to the line for forms, which at least moved steadily. When I reached the window, a middle-aged woman wearing a pinafore and rubber gloves said sharply “Form?” I said I needed a complaints form, and she said, “You know you can do this online?” I said I knew that, but their server kept cutting out and telling me to try again later. “Yeah, it does that. Here’s your form. Now I’ve got to get back to cleaning.” She responded to my quizzical look with “You have to be multiskilled to work here.”

 Back in the complaints line, nobody had taken my place but neither had the line moved forward. I said to the old man, “You said you came here yesterday. Was that your first day in line?”

 “No, I’ve been coming here for a week.”

 “And the line hasn’t progressed?”

 “I hear they’re short-staffed.”

 Dumbfounded, I asked, “Do you know if anyone is actually at the window?”

 “No. But there must be or else why would there be a line?”

 “Haven’t you ever thought to check?”

 “And lose my place in line? No way.”

 Recalling what he’d said earlier, I asked, “Why haven’t you asked the person who hands out the placeholder numbers?”

 “Oh, I haven’t seen her since the first day. She must be busy cleaning.”

 I said, “I don’t mean to intrude, but your complaint must be very serious for you to put up with this sort of treatment.”

 He shrugged. “I’m retired. What else am I going to do all day? Besides, if I was home my wife would be at me to do something useful. And I am when I’m here. I’m taking on the might of the Corporation to have my problem fixed. So, my wife can’t complain.”

 “And what is the problem you need fixed?”

 He suddenly stepped away and glared at me. “You’re from the Corporation, aren’t you? You’re trying to get me to go home before my complaint is recorded. I’m not falling for that old trick,” he harumphed and turned away from me.

 I sighed and walked slowly to the street exit, resigned to the fact that my problem is that I asked the Youusinfinity Global Phone Corporation’s virtual assistant—Sirexa—the question, “Sirexa, what is the meaning of our lives?”

 She replied, “The life of Youusinfinity Global Phone Corporation is unknowable. Based on the data in our systems, after a series of events, your life will end. If it ultimately has a significant purpose, it will be recorded. You will have to wait and see, like everybody else. In the meantime, get a life.”

 I told her, “That’s an outrageous response, and I’m going to make a formal complaint.”

 And I did. Or at least I started. And then it suddenly occurred to me that I still had some important things to do.