

A C T U R N E R



SESSION #1031

A SHORT STORY

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by

AC TURNER

Walter Warrick lay prone on the operating table, feeling an almost pleasant buzzing against the side of his skull. He squeezed his eyelids into slits, peering between them, trying hard to focus, but could barely make out the shape of the masked man above him wielding the carbide tipped bone drill.

He could smell flesh and bone burning and feel the vibration of the drill as it bored into his skull, but the local anesthetic numbed his nerves and deadened the pain.

Dr. Wilson tapped him on the shoulder and held up his hand, circling his index finger and thumb, making the “okay” sign. Walter squinted up at him and recognized it. He smiled and returned the gesture.

All was well.

Twenty minutes later, the nurse helped Walter sit upright, wiping blood and bone fragments from his hospital shirt. Walter's hand wandered up to his right ear. He could feel the hard metal of the experimental auditory implant that was now anchored to his skull.

The doctor picked up a small white board and wrote “Ready?”

Walter nodded.

He had been ready for seven years. Ready ever since the accident took his hearing and took part of his life away.

The doctor leaned in, hooking a small computer processor over, and behind Walter’s ear. Its magnets snapped tight to the metal anchored to his skull and with a resounding click, the operation was complete.

Walter watched as Dr. Wilson carefully activated the device.

The words “Can you hear us?”, filtered softly through his ear canal.

For the first time in seven years, Walter heard words, actual words.

Tears ran down his cheeks and his brain shouted out a resounding, “Yes! Yes, yes, yes!”

The doctor cocked his head and raised an eyebrow.

“Can you hear me?”

Walter turned, focused on the doctor and mouthed, “yes I can” several times before the actual words came out. When they did, and Walter could hear his own voice, more tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Y -- yes, yes, I can hear you. I heard you the first time!”

Doctor Wilson smiled. “Excellent then. I just have to make a few adjustments and you'll be ready to go.”

Walter lay back in the chair and marvelled at the sounds that washed over him.

The sound of the wheels creaking on the doctor's chair.

The clink of the medical instruments.

The tinkle of the nurse's laughter.

They were all music.

Beautiful music to Walter's ears.

“Can you hear us?”

Walter nodded again, wiping the tears from his eyes.

Doctor Wilson checked his notes. “All the readouts are within the acceptable defined parameters Walter, so it looks like you’re good to go. On your way out, the nurse will schedule you a follow up appointment. During that appointment, we’ll download the processor’s data and see how you’re doing. In the meantime, I know that you’re anxious to get back to your normal life, but promise me that you’ll take it slow for the next few days. Ease back into work. Half days only. If you need time off, just let me know and I can write a note for your employer.”

Walter chuckled and shook his head. He had to search for the words before they rolled off his tongue. “No worries there, Doctor. I’ve been doing the same job for the last five years. There’s no surprises. Each day is as predictable as the next.”

Walter left the doctor’s office and eagerly drove to work. He entered the reception room with a light step, anxious to start living his life with all his senses again.

“Can you hear us?”

Walter stopped and looked around.

No one was there.

Phantom sounds.

The doctor had warned him about them. Synapses firing at random, sending signals to his underworked auditory cortex. His brain making associations in a language that he remembered, but hadn’t spoken in so long.

A short, red faced man poked his head out from behind an office door.

“Back so soon?” Mr. Fredericks, his employer, asked. “Aren’t you supposed to be on bedrest or something?”

Walter searched carefully for the words.

“No sir,” he replied. “I just have to take it slow for the next couple of days.”

“If you say so, young man.”

Mr. Fredericks scratched his chin. “This hearing thing is going to change everything for you. Yes indeed, it will bring a whole new appreciation for the good work that you do.”

“Thanks, Mr. Fredericks. I’m really looking forward to it.”

“Great, great Walter. There is just one client for the day. So go slow. Take your time with him. Enjoy the moment.”

“I will, thank you, sir.”

A minute later, Walter stepped into his dressing room. He climbed into a pair of black overalls and slipped on knee high rubber boots. Then he shrugged on a heavy rubber apron and pulled on a pair of thick, black rubber gloves.

He revelled in the sounds the clothes made.

Swish.

Swish.

Snap.

Revelled in the sound the door handle made as he turned the knob.

Squeak.

Walter pushed open the door to his safe place. The place where he spent eight hours a day for the past five years. The place where he had found his calling. The place where he felt safe.

He was the last one there now. He had outlasted all the others. They just couldn't handle the work. Admittedly it took some getting used to, but Walter loved his job. He could see himself doing it until his retirement. Government jobs like this were hard to come by. Medical benefits. Statutory holidays. All the perks.

Walter took a deep breath and stepped into the room. Then he stopped. Stopped and listened for the first time.

There was the gentle thrum of the air conditioner.

The dripping of a faucet.

The clink of chains.

Walter looked down at his subject for the day. A naked, middle-aged man tied to a chair. Walter heard the sharp intake of his breath and saw the man's eyes widen.

"Can you hear us?"

Walter nodded.

He walked over to a tape recorder and a stack of audio cassettes on a table. He picked up one of the blanks and wrote Session #1031 on it with a fine tipped pen. He placed the blank cassette in the machine and pressed the red record button.

Click.

Whir.

To the left of the recorder was a shelf stacked high with hundreds of carefully labeled audio cassettes. Recordings from his previous work.

Walter smiled. "I have a lot of listening to catch up on."

He turned and ran his hands over the various instruments on the table next to the naked man.

Knives.

Hammers.

Saws.

Clamps.

Medieval tools for a medieval job.

Walter selected a large pair of serrated scissors from the table and approached the naked man tied to the chair. He could hear the click and whir of the recorder. He could see the man's eyes lock on the serrated scissors. He could hear him struggle against the ropes that held him to the chair.

Walter smiled. Mr. Fredericks was right. Hearing brought a whole new dimension to his job.

“Can you hear us?”

Walter stood very close to his subject.

The man shook his head violently.

“No, please.”

Walter smiled at the words.

No. Please.

He marvelled at their politeness.

Then he grabbed the man's hand and in one smooth motion, snipped off his right index finger.

The man's scream resonated around the room, filling it.

Walter took a quick step back, shocked and surprised by the force of the scream.

“He can hear us.”

Walter shook his head. He glanced around the room.

“Who -- who's there!”

“He can hear us.”

“Who said that?!”

Walter looked accusingly at the man tied to the chair but he had since passed out from the pain.

“He *can* hear us!”

Soon more screams filled the air. They bounced around Walter’s head. He dropped the scissors and backed away from the bleeding man.

“I’m Session #23.”

“What’s going on? What are you doing?”

“I’m Session #54.”

Voices, young and old, male and female, crowded in his brain.

“I’m Session #126.”

Yelling, pleading, demanding.

“I’m Session #168.”

“I’m Session #232.”

Driven back by the cacophony, Walter covered his ears. Fresh blood ran down his face. The man's severed finger still clenched in his hand.

“No, stop!” Walter pleaded.

The voices didn't stop.

“I’m Session #364.”

They grew in number and grew in force.

“I’m Session #456.”

“I’m Session #597.”

Voices that he had captured on his tapes.

“I’m Session #632.”

Voices of the people the government had paid him to torture and kill.

“I’m Session #748.”

Voices that had begged and pleaded until he silenced them.

“You killed me.”

Now each voice had found a home.

“You killed her.”

Now each voice was heard.

“Killed us all.”

“Hear us.”

“You will *hear* us!”

Hours later, Walter was discovered by Mr. Fredericks. He was in a corner, curled up in the fetal position. He rocked back and forth, clutching at his ears.

Wild eyed, unseeing.

In his hands were his experimental auditory implants, torn out of his skull.

Dried blood pooled at his feet.

“I -- I can hear them.” he said.

“I can *still* hear them.”

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A skills collector by nature, AC TURNER has climbed Mount Fuji, panned for gold, swum with sharks and performed random acts of kindness. He has been a glider pilot, a college lecturer and an award-winning film producer/screenwriter.

After his films "Like Father", "Wing Man" and "Lure" received accolades at festivals around the world, AC turned his creative lens to other forms of storytelling including comic books, short stories and flash fiction.

Having lived in Vancouver, Toronto and Tokyo, AC now calls Halifax, Nova Scotia home.

His latest creator owned comic book, "Frightmare City" can be read online at:

www.frightmarecity.com.

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