

Hearing Voices

A short story by Hayden Yale

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If you've found these notes then it means I have not returned to the lab and that I am likely dead. My name is John Copeland and I am the lead scientist involved in the Genetic Enhancement program, a program that has yet to begin any official experiments but one that I fear has resulted in a catastrophe.

The problems started happening on Monday night, a couple of hours after everyone else had left the lab. Alone, I sat and watched the news, wondering what had caused the hysteria, the panic, the deaths. It didn't occur to me that it could have something to do with our work here, not then, why would it? Worried about my colleagues, I gave them a call to check that they were okay. Jenny was fine but Dan was clearly distressed. When he answered the phone, he didn't really speak to me, he was more interested in a heated argument with his wife Sarah. When I did manage to catch his attention, he bluntly told me that it wasn't a good time and then he hung up. I tried to call back but nobody answered. I checked on Jenny again and insisted that she return to the lab.

I don't know why I wanted Jenny here. Was I worried about her safety or my own sanity? It was selfish to ask her to come back here, but would things have been different for either of us if she hadn't?

What Jenny told me about her journey back was scary. She was sure she had seen bodies on the pavements, people just lying there, probably dead. And car after car left idle in the streets as the occupants shouted abuse at each other and fought amongst themselves. We decided that we should start the lock-down procedure in the lab, at least until morning. Locked in, we couldn't sleep, and so we watched the continuing riots on TV, hoping that the morning would bring some peace, and some answers.

Tuesday morning came and by 10am I was getting very worried. The TV had stopped broadcasting during the night and Jenny, after a little sleep, had begun to act differently. She'd said a little caffeine would fix her, but I could sense that she was agitated and much of our conversation was abrupt and tense. By lunchtime, she was starting to sound a little crazy, complaining about a noise in her head.

I decided that the lock-down should remain, I think Jenny agreed but, honestly, I don't think she heard me ask her. The biggest problem with our containment was the lack of a telephone. I don't know why we hadn't considered this before sealing ourselves in? The phone that I had used the night before was only a room away, but it may as well have been in another city for all the good it did us. Mobile phones are pointless here too, you can't get a signal this far underground. Without TV broadcasts and with no way for us to communicate with the outside world, we were completely alone. And, for Jenny, time was running out.

Watching Jenny, as she slowly lost her mind, was the hardest thing I've ever been forced to do. Her mood jumped from calm to irate with each passing minute and it was taking a toll on her energy as she got weaker. As a scientist, I should have been able to run tests, find out what was wrong with her. The truth is, I'm out of my depth, I might be the man in charge here but only because I vouched for Dan and his theories. I was only hired to keep an eye

on him and make sure that his experiments were run in accordance with policy. His work on DNA manipulation in chimps shouldn't have started yet but I've found evidence that he might have started by himself on Sunday.

As Jenny's health deteriorated, all I could do was try and make her comfortable. For a short time, it seemed she was getting better. The noise that she could hear had become more manageable and our conversations became more relaxed. Our talk soon slowed as Jenny grew more and more tired. She then said four words that changed our relationship completely. "I Love You Too".

At first I wasn't sure why she'd told me this. She was right about my feelings for her, I'd loved her for 10 years, since we had first met, but why had she said it? Whilst I was still processing the words, worried that they were not meant as I'd imagined, she watched me and smiled before gently saying "Of course I meant it, I never say anything that I don't mean, you know that". She was right again, I did know that.

We sat there looking at each other for what seemed like an eternity. I wasn't sure how to react, how do you react? For Jenny to tell me her feelings would have been the best news in the world, but I could hear despair in her voice and it was obvious that her life was ebbing away. But that wasn't the real reason for my silence. Had she just read my mind? I didn't need to ask her in the conventional sense. Jenny answered the question before the words escaped my mouth.

This was... this IS an amazing discovery. How has it happened? Jenny was too tired to give me every answer but it was soon obvious that she could hear everything I was thinking, and I mean everything. I tried to stop thinking about her, but in doing so, I only thought more about her, and she knew it. We spent our last hour together, just holding each other, not speaking, just thinking. I hope the last thoughts that she heard were good ones.

I've been alone now for a day and I have no idea what to do. I'm hungry, thirsty, tired, restless, frightened. I'm still in shock about Jenny, I can't even describe how I feel right now about that, I just don't have the words.

I can't stay here forever but I don't know what will happen to me outside. Are there people alive out there? I might find other people alive, but what if I don't, what if they are all dead? Worse, what if I find people who want me dead? Jenny said how violent people were outside on Monday night, I can't suffer that fate, not now.

Why was Jenny able to hear my thoughts? What has Dan done? Is it Dan? I've looked at the access logs for the lab and he and Sarah spent most of Sunday here but I can't find any signs of their work. We haven't received our test subjects yet, they are not due for weeks, but what if they didn't wait for the chimps? Dan has been pressing me for weeks now to start the experiments early, what if he couldn't wait?

I unsealed the lab last night. I had no intention of leaving the complex, I just wanted to check the telephone. I should have guessed, it was dead. So that's it, nothing left for me to do now but leave this place and take a look outside. I've been as far as the lobby, the world is still there, but I didn't find any people, alive or otherwise. The sun was shining outside though. I think that's a good sign, and I saw a squirrel out on the lawns, so something is still alive out there.

I'm stalling now, I know, so I'll finish by saying the one thing I've been reluctant to admit. I

heard Jenny's thoughts, before she passed, just briefly. It's only a matter of time before I start hearing voices too.