

Memories, Not Echoes

By Robert Kibble

The weirdest thing was I thought I heard someone's voice, someone familiar, just for a second.

It went dark, and I froze. There was a distinct click, and then nothing.

Not just the nothing you normally get on a quiet night, no. Nothing. Properly nothing. This was an anechoic chamber, used for accurate measurements of sounds. Even though I knew the sound couldn't escape, I still shouted: "Come on! Open the door!"

Could it have just fallen shut? I thought I'd left it hooked properly when I came in, but I couldn't picture the hook. I was pretty sure the tag had been there, though. Yes, the tag, making sure someone would check the room before locking up, was definitely hanging where it should have done.

Right, someone will be coming round to lock up. Just stay calm. Just breathe normally. Ignore the fact that this place is basically airtight.

Why tonight of all nights? Tonight, the night when my drop-dead-gorgeous once-and-future girlfriend Janey is finally coming back to me? She'll be heading down from Glasgow, and she'd expect me to be waiting for her. We didn't actually arrange that, but she'd expect it. Still, she knows where my parents' place is if I'm not there. She was there before, after all. That wonderful weekend.

Oh come on, someone, open the damn door.

Right, which way is the door? Have I moved since it shut? I only came in to change one of the foam cones, and I was going to leave. For a bank holiday weekend of unadulterated joy. I can picture Janey's long hair, her dark eyes, her boundless energy. I can almost smell her. God, I love that woman, and to think we've been apart for so long. How stupid was I letting her go, but I guess we were young, foolish, and not ready. Now, though, I'm not going to let this chance pass me by. She deserves the best weekend ever. She'll really know how much I love her.

Come on now, don't panic. The walkway is different to the sections with cones. I can get down on all fours and feel my way back to the door.

Was there a handle on the inside? It had always been open when I came in here. But there must be a handle, right? Behind one of the cones or something. There has to be. I can feel round for it when I get there.

Where was the guy locking up? Surely he should be coming? I can't see my watch, but it was close to home-time when I came in here.

Maybe Janey would realise where I was. She knew I was working here for the summer. She worked here last year, between her first and second years, before we went out. It was Janey who suggested the place, partly because of this amazing room. She said it felt really weird after a while, when you could start to hear the sounds of your own body.

She loved her summer here. She spent some of the time playing a game with the security guards, first off lifting her pass with her hand obscuring most of it, then later when she'd managed to get a credit card – one of those Access ones – she noticed the green was quite similar to the passes, so she got in with that. Later on she just held up paper, or a hand, as she came through. She's like that, Janey – so confident when she wants to be.

Where's the damned door? It's so black, and my eyes are starting to see things – shapes – that I know aren't there. Flying things buzzing about. I can hear some kind of buzzing. No, it's a whooshing sound. Is that me? Or am I imagining it. Where's the door?

My parents are away, so they won't be there to let her in. What will she do? She knows I'd be there. I'm never late. Never. She used to be late, so she probably won't even have arrived yet. I found that so frustrating when we first went out, but it'll be better this time. I'm calmer now, happier in myself. More confident.

OK, here's the wall. Is it the door? There's no obvious crack, but this has to be where the door would be, because I've followed the walkway. About handle-height, there are the usual cones. They do come off, so I can pull each one off in turn and feel... just the wall behind. No handle. There has to be one. Balls.

I shout again. Damn that stupid door, I need to get out of here.

I'm not late. I've never been late for her. I can't be late – not for my chance to make this right, to get back with her. God, I love her.

This was going to be – no, it is going to be – the best weekend ever. Even better than the last time, when she popped down for a weekend, again when my folks were away. We went out to a nice restaurant and we had a lot to drink, and we went back and... oh, she is such a good kisser. We raided mum's gin cabinet, and then started making out on the sofa, and it was her first time too. It was a bit awkward at first, but she settled into it, and then I carried her upstairs. The romance of it all. She was tired, and a bit woozy by that stage, but she flopped onto bed and we had the best time ever. Even in here, trapped in this sodding room, I'm still smiling at the memory of it. More than just smiling.

Where's that handle? The cones come off, from near the floor, from higher up, from the sides – where's that damned handle? Come on, it's got to be...

YES!

A handle. Thank heaven for that. Turn, and I'm out of here.

It turns.

I pull. I push. The door doesn't budge.

But that's not possible, surely? It doesn't lock automatically, does it? People come in here to do experiments – it can't just swing shut and be locked?

Come on, breathe. Right, think. The tag is still there. Someone will come. Someone has to come.

How much air is there in here? How long can a person survive in an airtight chamber?

Stop fucking breathing so much!

Shit shit shit.

Come on, Janey – realise where I am and come looking.

Someone, come looking!

Please?

Why now? After I've finally convinced her to come back, after all this time? I slump down with my back to the door. I want to hit something, to smash the door, to smash through the walls. Why now?

She'll think I'm late. I hate that. I hate that almost as much as being trapped in this stupid room. I'm never late. Not even by a minute. She'll laugh it off, though, like she always did when she was late, like when she couldn't decide what to wear for my friend's twenty-first. She kept changing clothes and changing clothes, and kept saying it was fine if we were there half an hour late, but I wanted to be there from the beginning. He was my friend. He'd said eight, so I wanted to be there at eight, and Janey kept changing her whole outfit. I kept telling her she looked great in anything, but that didn't seem to cut it, and when it got past eight and she still hadn't decided, I got so angry with her. Then she ended up deciding she felt ill and not coming. She did that a few times while we were going out, and it kept winding me up so much. I don't know if she realised how much until I properly lost my temper with her. I slapped her. I shouldn't have. I know that, but it just kept happening. We ended up not going out much – I guess it was right we split up, at least back then. So we could both get to know ourselves.

I wish she were here now, opening that door. I'd leap into her arms so fast. Come on, someone.

It's taken weeks to persuade her to come back. Her mum said she didn't want to talk to me, but I knew that wasn't true. I knew deep down she felt the same for me, and I'm right. She's back. She's here if only I can get out of this stupid stupid room.

We finally spoke, and I reminded her of that night, of all the wine, and the kissing, and the bedroom. I told her how sexy it was. She was surprised I remembered at first, but it was our first time – of course I'd remember. Besides, I'd borrowed my dad's camcorder and took a tape of her lying there. Damn, she looked so hot. Hotter than anything I've seen on the internet. I told her that, and I guess that's when things really changed. She realised how much I loved her, and how beautiful I thought she was. That's when she finally melted and agreed to come down.

I can see her, lying on the bed in that video, right now. I can see her breathing, and her head rocking slightly. She's just sprawled back on the bed. God, how many times have I watched that, hoping she'd come back to me, and now I'm stuck here in this fucking room, which no one has checked, and how much air is there in here? Shit, someone, come back and check the room!

The tag was there when I came in. I know it. They have to come back and check all the tags when they lock up. They have to. I can picture it now. As I walked in, there it was: hanging by the door. I walked in here, walked up the central walkway to replace a cone, and I was just leaning down. I can remember that moment, just before it went dark.

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