



EPISODE 23

The Man Who Could Hear Everything

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Aryan woke up to another terrible day. It was terrible before it even began, because it was an obvious inevitability. Life was terrible, and I was Aryan. Or maybe Aryan was me, and torturing me with his life; I couldn't tell the difference.

The first step from when my feet hit the floor, life fast-forwarded; after all, who watches the same dismal repetitive routine over and over? The trip to the bathroom all the way to end of work seemed to pass in an instance. But for me, for me every moment was still lived, and even when speeding through, I experienced each one of them.

Skip to later that night, and I felt more than ever as if I was being watched by an audience, ready to witness the spectacle of my many failed endeavours.

I had come to a date; yet again, for the third time this month, and with each attempt it got even harder to find "love".

The audience seemed to skip through my date as well, probably tired of having to spectate me fumble my words and fail to connect with the foolish woman who had accidentally said yes to being asked out by me.

Dinner ended, and I asked her if we could, "Do this some other time?"

My failure resonated in her half-hearted "maybe". In the moment, the conversation had seemed to flow, at least in my own head. But, alas, I had to return to the drawing board.

As the viewers skipped ahead again, I pulled the bedcovers over me, thinking why my luck always sucks when it comes to women. And not just women, in the last year I realised just how few friends I had; having spent numerous festivals alone in front of the TV, I wished that I could read people's minds. Maybe that would help me gauge exactly what they wanted from a social interaction.

The notion sounded like a superpower; and maybe using it, I could finally turn my luck around.

Those were my last thoughts as I drifted off to sleep; I didn't stop to even flesh out my own idea, instead I fell asleep like a toddler during a lullaby.

Time felt slow, yet also fast. It couldn't have been more than twenty minutes since I woke up the morning before; yet here I was again, awake. I felt well rested, ready to take on another weary and dreadful day. Maybe I would get rejected again today, I thought; all the while fast-forwarding through my morning routine.

However, instead of skipping directly to after work, I found myself stepping out of the door to my apartment. Strange, I thought to myself; I couldn't remember this scene before, yet it also had a certain type of familiarity as if I had lived it over and over again.

My neighbour, Nazia, was also stepping out of her apartment at the exact same moment.

"Hello neighbour," I said, pleasantly smiling.

She proceeded to smile back and say, "Hello," before marching out of the hallway at a fast pace.

I looked down at my watch, and that's when I heard Nazia speak once again; only this time, it sounded quite different.

"Ugh, I'm so tired of living next to this loser. Wish I had an interesting neighbour for a change."

I looked up, but Nazia was already rounding the corner out of our shared hallway, and I wasn't going to chase after her.

Instead I took one step towards the same corner leading out of the building, when I found myself walking in the midst of a crowd.

I didn't question these things, and continued to walk towards my office, which was a block away at this point. That's when I noticed Zarif, my "oldest" friend.

He waved me his way, and just as we were about to begin our conversation, I heard Zarif, only he wasn't talking.

"Why do I have to run into him? I didn't need this today. Now he's going to ask me to hang out."

I was shocked by this interchange of words without any movement of Zarif's lips and could only reply by saying, "What?!"

"What do you mean what?" replied Zarif, only this time the words came from his mouth.

"Didn't you just say something?" I asked.

"No," he replied. Adding with his mouth closed, "What's this buffoon on about? Can't he even discern words now?"

I found myself freaked out, almost panicking. I had to run, things were getting weird. I turned away from Zarif and ran down the street, attempting to cover the last block as fast as I could.

The last thing I heard was Zarif's voice in a snide tone go, "He's going crazy, that idiot."

The scene changed, I was at my office cubicle. And even though I had left Zarif far behind, I couldn't shake the feeling of absolute panic from my soul. I stood up; I needed to get some water.

As I approached the water cooler, I noticed Neha.

Neha was my dream; for as long as I had worked here, I had hoped to ask her out. I wanted her more than anything; the moment of panic turned to insanity as my legs began walking towards her. I forgot my thirst, and instead found myself right in front of Neha; my body had lost control.

Neha smiled at me, as she always did. I couldn't tell if it was because she was nice, or if she too shared the same feelings for me.

"Hello," I stammered.

"Hi Masud," she replied, looking back at her computer.

"It's Aryan, not Masud."

That's when it happened again.

"Why doesn't this guy just leave?"

"What did you say?" I asked. I was beginning to feel flustered.

"Nothing," she replied.

"This idiot needs to get out of my face. Look at his bald head; I can't even look at his face without noticing it."

"I'M NOT BALD!!! I SHAVE MY HEAD!!!!" I screamed. My mind was slowly beginning to lose its sanity.

"How dare you raise your voice at me Masud---?"

"MY NAME IS ARYAN!!!!!"

Feeling absolutely manic, I ran towards the exit; only this time it's a door labelled *Stage 4*. As I pushed myself through it, I was greeted by applause.

I froze, like a deer in the headlights. I was on a stage of some sort, with hundreds of people in the seats in front of me.

My heart was shaking; I found myself struggling to breathe. As I looked around, my head turning 90 degrees faster than it ever had, a man in a tuxedo came right up to me.

He had a microphone in his hand, as he put his arms around me and looked at the audience before calmly saying, "Thank you for joining us tonight folks. Today we witnessed the episode of the *Man Who Could Hear Everything*. Tune in tomorrow for our special feature on *The Insanity Island*."

The curtains began to fall; and as the lights went out, so did I.

Aaqib loves petting doggos. Send him pictures of your "good boys" at aaqibhasib94@gmail.com