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## I Know They're Listening

by Ivor John

I've lived in here for seventeen years, in this flat. I had been working for Jarolds when I moved in. The department store in London Street. I had started there when I was fifteen, as a Saturday boy in packing. When I left school I was lucky and got a job as an accounts clerk. It was repetitive, but I liked that, I liked knowing what to expect. I didn't particularly enjoy socialising and so preferred to work long hours.

I was made junior accounts clerk after two years and seven months. It was a lot of responsibility, it required dealing with our regular suppliers. Ordering stock, checking against invoices. I sometimes had to arrange sales promotions with them and then organise the in-store marketing with the merchandise team. This was particularly hard as they were often difficult, seeming reluctant to work with me. I don't think they liked my direct manner. The work was very responsible and I took it seriously, which they never recognised.

At first they did, but then there was a new supervisor, not much older than me. He had worked for Debenhams in Oxford Place before he got the job at Jarolds. I didn't like him and it seemed I could never do anything right. When I would try to explain I was told I was argumentative.

When mother died, it had become more difficult. I had found it very hard to concentrate. I felt incompetent, that I was useless. I knew that people were talking about me, conversations would stop when I entered. I started to feel uncomfortable, and didn't want to go in. Then I couldn't go in. I was sent details of a meeting with HR and my manager, but I didn't go. After which I got a letter from them in a brown window envelope, which I didn't read. My pay stopped going into my bank account shortly after.

I had moved to the flat after mother passed. The house had to be sold, but I inherited enough to buy it. It had two bedrooms and was in a small block of eight similar flats, in Manchester Street.

A short walk from the town, it had been perfect for working at Jarolds. The second bedroom, and most of the lounge were piled up with things I had needed to bring from Mother's house. Cushions she had made, her sewing machine, several piles of her clothes, bits and pieces that it was hard to get rid of. Some things I had known since childhood.

I used to eat in the staff canteen, and rarely if ever, cooked. When I had to take a holiday or a day off, there were a lot of cheap restaurants nearby where I could buy a lunch. I continued to do this for a while when I was not going in to work, but I less and less wanted to go out. I had heard people in the restaurants talking about me. At first I had thought they must be people from Jarolds, but realised that I did not know them, although they obviously knew me. They started to follow me home. I had to go through the park where I could see them. They would then arrange for other people, whom I couldn't always see, to follow me. Sometimes I spotted them, pretending to be casually looking at the ducks by the pond as I would walk past.

When I had moved in, an elderly couple lived below me. Although we didn't speak often, I quite liked them. Sometimes the postman would leave packages for them with me. I would keep them until I could hear they were back home and then I would leave the packages with them. The old man had needed to go into a home and I think his wife went to stay with their children.

They kept the flat but rented it out, which is when my problems at home started. A middle aged man on his own moved in. At first it seemed to be alright. He would keep himself to himself. But then I heard him talking about me to another neighbour. I realised then, that he must have been listening to me in my flat. Trying to find out what I was doing. He had told the postman, never to leave packages with me. I didn't understand why he had done that.

I hadn't been out a lot anyway. Only when I had to, to buy milk or food, mostly tins of beans which were nutritious and simple to cook. I realised now that if I went out, the man downstairs would probably search my flat, to look at my things. He would steal things from the flat, I had noticed things had gone missing, and now I understood what had happened to them. I found a way of fixing the door with the vacuum cleaner to make sure they couldn't get in. I put my bedspread and sheets on the floor so that it was harder for him to hear through his ceiling. Although I was sure he had put devices in the walls when he had broken in.

He's probably listening right now.

