

Surely a Prank

by James Zhang, age 16, Coquitlam

Theodore didn't know why he bought the radio.

Worn, appalling, and grotesque. Blistered casing bowed inward like a ribcage as if something had clawed its way out from the inside. Its knobs—crooked and yellowed like old teeth. Thin grooves etched around the speaker grill. The old dodgy seller claimed that it still worked and whispered the magic word "Cheap."

For months though, the thing slumbered, festering beneath unopened moving boxes and crushed pizza cartons. Too ugly to display, too unsettling to touch. Yet somehow, he couldn't bring himself to throw it away.

But one restless night, Theodore dragged it out, plugged it in and sat at the table. The radio sputtered to life with a low unearthly buzz, then settled into a soft hum. The speaker grill pulsed—expanding, contracting, and breathing. Static swelled and suffocated.

Disappointingly, there was only one channel. The static cleared and a grim gravelly voice, low and ragged, crawled out of the speaker.

"Theodore sits at the desk, alone."

Theodore jolted upright, eyes darting around. A nervous laugh slipped from his throat, thin and hollow.

Surely a prank.

"Theodore jumps and checks, seeing no one."

The voice repeated his movements, each word precise, as though spoken by something watching from somewhere hidden. His chest felt heavy with dread.

Static churned. Thicker this time.

"Theodore will lean in to listen to me closer."

Before the radio finished speaking, his body betrayed him. His chest lurched forward, heart hammering against his ribs. His reflection in the glass dial looked ashen and distorted, fogged by heavy breaths clouding the surface.

"Theodore will whisper to himself, 'This is madness.'"

"This is madness," Theodore muttered, voice breaking. His throat clenched shut. The words forced themselves out anyway, using his tongue, borrowing his mouth, stealing his voice.

The voice giggled. Gleeful, bubbly, wet. "Theodore does not notice he is no longer alone."

The air thickened and chilled. Something threw itself against the speaker from inside. Not sound, but substance. Something writhed behind the grill. Pulsing. Breathing. Pushing.

The speaker grill bowed outward, groaning. Bulged like fabric stretching. It clawed through. Twisting. Convulsing. Metal shrieking. The casing collapsed inward. Fresh grooves carved themselves along the sides. It rose.

"Theodore will scream."

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Two officers came days later to investigate. Static rattled from a battered radio, the only sound in the silence. Boxes had been knocked over and littered the floor. The radio's table had severe slashes in it. Theodore's body was leaning up against the table. His mouth was still open. Mid-scream but no sound.

"Looks like a struggle, but there's no blood..." the first officer murmured.

"What could have done this?" the second officer asked, leaning in to examine the gouges.

Suddenly static started to swell. The air shifted. Too cold. Too thick. Too still. A grim, gravelly voice crawled out of the speaker.

"The officers wish to know what happened. I can tell them. I can show them. Would they like that?"
