

HEARING AID

by

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INT HEARING AID STORE - DAY

MORRIS ABLE, 70, as cantankerous as his age allows, stands across the counter from BENNIE, 50, the glib owner of this store. On the counter sits Morris's new hearing aid, one of many models in the store.

MORRIS

You're telling me the battery only lasts a week?

BENNIE

If you wear it every day, and I recommend that you do.

MORRIS

Hell, putting in a new battery every week will bankrupt me.

BENNIE

Batteries aren't expensive. You can order them in bulk off the internet.

MORRIS

So, I have to walk around with a bunch batteries in my pocket?

BENNIE

The device tells you when the battery is low. Keep a spare in your wallet, and you'll never go dark.

MORRIS

Dark?

BENNIE

Shut down. It's an expression. Believe me, Mr. Able, once you get used to your new Ear-Perfect audio enhancer, you'll wonder how you ever lived without it.

MORRIS

It's a damn hearing aid, and it costs ten times as much as my glasses.

BENNIE

Why don't you put it in. We'll check the fit.

Grousing, Morris picks up the hearing aid and clumsily tries to insert it into his ear. Bennie reaches over and helps place the ear piece. Morris doesn't like it but accepts help.

BENNIE

There, how does it feel?

MORRIS

Like I got a damn bug in my ear.

BENNIE

Your hearing, how is that?

MORRIS

Makes you sound like you're shouting.

BENNIE

(smiling)

I think you're exaggerating, but I'm glad my voice is louder.

MORRIS

You know, if it wasn't for my wife's bitching, I wouldn't be getting this fancy doodad.

Bennie looks over Morris' shoulder. Through the front window, he spots a black SUV pull to the curb.

BENNIE

Well, I hope you'll be happy with your audio...hearing aid. Here is your maintenance kit and extra batteries.

Two AGENTS, as Government as red tape, emerge from the SUV and head for the door.

Bennie reaches under the counter and pulls out a second box.

BENNIE

You know, sometimes these devices don't work exactly as they should. So, here's a backup.

MORRIS

I got to pay for a backup?

BENNIE

No, no, it's included with the service. Our way of ensuring that you're never without your audio augmentation.

MORRIS

Aug what?

BENNIE

Hearing aid.

The door opens, and the Agents, in sunglasses enter. This can't be good.

AGENT 1

Mr. Sharp, we're Federal agents.

BENNIE

What do you want?

AGENT 1

To ask you a few questions.

BENNIE

Of course.

(pushing boxes to Morris)

Here you are, Mr. Able.

With that Bennie smiles, whirls, and races into the back room. The Agents hesitate a moment and then react. One rounds the counter, and the other leaps over, leaving a bewildered Morris.

MORRIS

Hot damn.

He gathers his boxes and heads out, happier than he should be.

INT MORRIS HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

A dated kitchen in a dated house with a dated wife, BETTY, a few years younger than Morris and as combative as 40 years of marriage can make her.

MORRIS

(sipping lemonade)

I'm telling you it was right out of a movie. They say they want to talk, and that guy skeedaddles out of there like he's on fire.

BETTY

He was probably selling drugs. It's always about drugs...or porn. With men, it's sometimes kiddy porn.

Betty has the hearing aid boxes on the counter. She lays out everything in the kit and then opens the extra box.

BETTY

You bought two hearing aids?

MORRIS

Why would I buy two? Only need one.

BETTY

There are two here.

MORRIS

They gave me a spare, in case the first one breaks.

BETTY

A spare? I've never heard of that. When Tillie got hers, she only got one, and not enough batteries either. They give you extra batteries?

MORRIS

Extra batteries and a spare hearing aid. Tell Tillie to smoke that.

Morris starts to fiddle with his hearing aid, pulling it out of his ear and looking at it.

BETTY

Or it could be tax evasion. Lots of small businesses never pay taxes. What are you doing? Put it back in.

MORRIS

They didn't look like IRS guys if you know what I mean. It makes my ear itch.

BETTY

Tillie says you put a tiny bit of baby powder on it, and that takes the itch away. Did they look like Secret Service? He might have threatened the president.

Morris lays the hearing aid on the counter and leaves to get powder.

MORRIS

It's under the sink in the bathroom, right?

BETTY

You know where it is, you use it every time you eat Mexican.

She opens the box and pulls out the extra hearing aid. Then, she compares it with the one Morris removed. They look the same.

Her arthritic fingers drop them, and they bounce on the counter. She picks them up, and she can't tell one from another. As Morris shuffles in, she puts one down and one in the box.

MORRIS

Next time, don't hide it behind
the mouthwash.

He takes the hearing aid off the counter and starts to sprinkle powder on the aid.

BETTY

Not like that. You put some on
your finger and rub it on.

Morris follows her directions, putting a dab of powder on the ear plug.

BETTY

Makes it smell good too, not like
an old-man ear.

MORRIS

My ears don't stink.

He struggles to place the plug into his ear.

BETTY

Let me help

He pushes her away and slips in the plug.

MORRIS

I got it, I got it. There.

BETTY (V.O.)

Go ahead, be a horse's ass, you
old coot.

MORRIS

What'd you say?

BETTY

I said I wanted to help.

MORRIS

Didn't sound like that to me.

BETTY

Well, that's why you need the hearing aid.

(V.O.)

Of course, something to keep your dick up would be better for both of us.

Morris stares at her.

MORRIS

You got something in your craw, missy?

BETTY

I got your bad attitude in my craw.

(V.O.)

And don't call me missy, asshole.

Morris shakes his head as if it's full of something. He even taps his hearing aid.

MORRIS

I hear you, but your lips don't move.

BETTY

What are you jabbering about? Of course my lips move.

MORRIS

Not every time.

BETTY (V.O.)

Losing your mind, old man?

MORRIS

Like that, I heard that. I'm not losing my mind.

BETTY

Who said you were?

MORRIS

You just said it.

BETTY

I never said any such thing.

MORRIS

Like hell, I ain't deaf, *missy*.

BETTY

No, you're just in a mood.

She waves her hands and starts away.

BETTY

And I don't have to put up with your moods. Remember, we're going to the Colin's in an hour.

(V.O.)

And I can get popped there. They serve good wine, not like my asshole husband.

Morris starts after her but stops.

MORRIS

I heard that too.

He gets no answer.

INT MORRIS HOUSE KITCHEN - LATER

Door opens, and Betty marches in. She's steamed, with Morris following.

MORRIS

What was I supposed to do?

BETTY

Don't talk to me.

MORRIS

Can I help it if Tillie thinks you
flirt too much with Bill?

She turns to confront him.

BETTY

She didn't say that.

MORRIS

I heard it.

BETTY

Like you heard Bill?

MORRIS

What am I supposed to do when a
man calls my wife a whore?

BETTY

He never said that!

MORRIS

No, what he said was he wanted to
shove his stiffy down your throat.

BETTY

He never said it, and even if he
did, you had no right to hit him.

MORRIS

No man talks about my wife that
way.

BETTY

You're insane. INSANE! You're
hearing things that no one says,
making up insults in your mind.
It's as if you had a stroke, a
stroke, and now you're hearing
voices. It's crazy, CRAZY!

She spins and marches away.

MORRIS

Not just any voice, MISSY! The
voices of my so-called FRIENDS!

BETTY (V.O.)

I have to get help for him.

Morris stares but doesn't bother to answer. He goes to the fridge, opens it, and pulls out a beer.

MORRIS

I'm not CRAZY.

A KNOCK on the back door startles him. He opens it to find Bennie, flanked by the Agents.

BENNIE

Hello, Mr. Able.

MORRIS

What do you want?

AGENT 1

You have something that belongs to us.

MORRIS

Like hell. Go away.

AGENT 2 (V.O.)

I don't want to hurt you, old man.

MORRIS

(to Agent 2)

You try anything, and I'll hand you your head.

BENNIE

Let us in, Morris. We have to talk.

Morris is loathe to let them in.

AGENT 1 (V.O.)

Force is within our parameters.

Morris steps back, and they enter the kitchen.

MORRIS

State your business and get out.

BENNIE

It's about your hearing aid, the backup one.

MORRIS

What about it?

AGENT 1

It's belongs to the government.

MORRIS

Like hell it does. I paid good money for it.

AGENT 2 (V.O.)

Don't be a problem.

MORRIS

(to Agent 2)

You're the problem, not me.

Agent 1 looks at Agent 2.

AGENT 1 (V.O.)

He's wearing it.

MORRIS

Hell yes I'm wearing my hearing aid. Why wouldn't I?

BENNIE

I don't know how much I can tell you.

AGENT 1

Careful. This is a need-to-know project.

BENNIE

I'll be brief. I consulted on a...National Security effort to develop a particular type of hearing device.

AGENT 1

And he stole a prototype.

BENNIE (V.O.)

I wanted to sell it to the highest bidder.

AGENT 1

He tried to hide it by giving it to you.

BENNIE

It was a bad idea.

MORRIS

And now you want it back?

AGENT 2 (V.O.)

Don't be difficult.

AGENT 1

Yes, we want it back. You were never meant to have it.

Morris studies the three men.

BENNIE (V.O.)

I wonder if they'll throw me in jail.

AGENT 1 (V.O.)

Don't make us take it.

AGENT 2 (V.O.)

Should I draw my weapon?

MORRIS

What exactly does this hearing aid do?

AGENT 1

I think you know.

Morris nods and then removes the hearing aid from his ear. Agent 1 takes it and shows it to Bennie.

BENNIE

That's it.

AGENT 1

(to Morris)

We thank you for your cooperation.

BENNIE
Are you done with me?

AGENT 1
I'm afraid not.

They head for the door.

MORRIS
That thing caused nothing but
problems anyway.

The door closes a second before Betty enters.

BETTY
Were you talking to someone?

MORRIS
Myself, just myself.

BETTY
I called Dr. Copeland, and he
suggests the emergency room.
Strokes sometimes cause people to
hear voices.

MORRIS
I didn't have a stroke.

BETTY
Please, let's just make sure.

Morris picks up the hearing aid box on the counter. He
opens it, removes the aid, and places it in his ear.

BETTY
I thought you were already wearing
one.

MORRIS
That was the backup. This is the
one I'm supposed to wear.

BETTY
Do you want me to drive?

He stares at her, but he can't hear what's in her head.

MORRIS

No, I'll drive.

BETTY

Are you sure? If you had a
stroke...

MORRIS

You heard me. I'll drive.

She grabs her purse off the counter and heads for the door.

BETTY

I swear you hear only what you
want to hear.

Morris half smiles and follows.

FADE OUT.