

REBOOT

R. J. DAVIES



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Contact through <https://.rjdavies.ca>

Online Edition

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Two weeks ago, it started as a soft humming, it was almost warm and comforting at first. Thought it was a noise coming from his apartment. Then noticed it followed him, outside, shopping, in the park and at work. It soon became a nuisance. Afraid to say anything because some of his neighbours already thought he was weird, this would just validate their opinions. He couldn't have that. Surely it would just go away, or so he thought. People who were weird tended to disappear and then reappear rebooted. It was a term that was on the downlow, hushed and whispered at parties. When someone came back rebooted, they were freshened, not quite themselves and their short-term memories were gone, wiped cleaned. It was as if they had taken a vacation and came back refresh but couldn't remember anything that happened on their vacation. No one wanted to go through that process. No one.

The humming turned into a buzzing noise; it was a constant unwelcomed companion. Sighing heavily Victor wondered if he could keep up the charade. The pretense that everything was normal? Swallowing hard, it was a loud buzzing noise that felt like it was sitting on his shoulder.

The noise gradually grew louder, day by day. Sitting on the bus heading to work, he began grinding his teeth, trying to concentrate on the people around him. He started to pick out little details about the other passengers trying to distract himself from the loud noise that was digging into his head. There were four students, a mother and child, a couple of older people. Several were self absorb, with their own distractions and social media devices. An older man got on the bus, showed his pass to the driver and rubbed his right ear agitated by something. The bus driver kept an eye on the guy out of the corner of his eye as the man staggered to the middle of the bus and took an empty seat. They had gotten

down the street about a block and half when the man slapped at the side of his head and began moaning, groaning and then whimpering. The couple sitting two seats behind him slowly moved to the back of the bus.

“Can’t you hear it?” asked the young woman that sat across from him.

She shook her head and looked away. He was making the other passengers uncomfortable.

“It so annoying! It won’t stop!” he half whimpered and half sobbed to himself.

Swallowing hard and fighting the urge to get up and comfort the distressed man. Victor tried to look away but couldn’t take his eyes off the gentleman.

“It won’t stop, day and night,” he leaned his head against the window. The driver was on the radio calling for assistance.

“Day and night, the buzzing is so loud,” he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. Shaking his head and lowering it. “Won’t stop,” he mumbled.

A few minutes passed, when the bus pulled over and came to a stop. It wasn’t one of the regular stops, Victor noted. The health inspectors came aboard and looked at everyone and zeroed in on the man sobbing. The woman in uniform walked over to the man and gently touched his shoulder. “Hey Allen, how are you feeling?”

He looked at her hopefully, “not so good Helen. Can’t you hear it?”

“Hear what?”

“The buzzing, it’s like a million bumble bees buzzing at the same time. It’s so loud.”

“Why don’t you come with me, and I can help you make it stop.”

“Really?” he looked at her wide eyed with his tear streaked face.

Helen nodded with a smile. “Come on,” she gently urged.

Allen started to get up, he slowly ambled into the aisle and stumbled two steps then paused. Towering over Helen. “You’re not going to reboot me are you?”

Helen shook her head no, “We are just going to help stop the buzzing. That’s all. Nothing to worry about really.”

“Helen I don’t want to get reboot!” he turned and started heading towards the back of the bus. Helen’s shoulders sank, her head dropped, and she sighed. It was all in an matter of a couple of seconds, then her head snapped back up and she pulled out her gun and shot Allen in the ass with a tranquilizer.

Allen fell hard on the floor. Looking up at the people around him, his last words were, “don’t let them take me like this! We’re not animals.” Then his eyes close and his breathing slowed down.

The buzzing felt like the bus was vibrating. He didn’t want to end up like Allen. Helen and her partner scooped Allen up and carried him off the bus, placing him on a stretcher and in the back of a van. Closing his eyes he tried to shut the whole incident out of his mind. The buzzing became his companion. His enemy, his companion, his doom. He knew in his heart within the next few days he was going to break down somewhere and they were going to come and take him away. There would be no escape. At least the buzzing would stop. The small consolation prize after getting rebooted. He often wondered if he had been rebooted. It wasn’t something people really talked about. It wasn’t a badge of honor, nor something to brag about either.

Chances are he had been rebooted. It would explained the high anxiety that he would get at the thought of it. Being rebooted was an unpleasant experience. Reserved for those who didn’t fit in, that were weird or crazy. People who heard things that weren’t there.

The bus moved forward, and they were on their way. The excitement was over, and the day was underway. Closing his eyes he took a deep breath in and held it. Slowly let it out, the buzzing a constant companion. It wasn’t going to go away on its own.

What if the buzzing was a sign? Maybe only a select few were receiving a message? A message for what? Was it a warning? A calling? A message that was being distorted? He rubbed his head and got off at his stop. The buzzing seemed to bounce off the high rises’ walls, ricocheting like a ball in a ping

pong game. Victor swallowed hard again as he made his way through the foot traffic to his building, entering the lobby. People were nodding and telling him good morning or good day. He couldn't hear their voices as the buzzing seemed to have intensified in the lobby area. Making his way to the elevators he just wanted to get to his office and sit at his desk. He would feel safe once he reached his desk.

The doors of the elevator closed with him inside, suddenly the buzzing stopped. It was just himself in the elevator and the silence was deafening. Rubbing his ears and shaking his head he looked around him in wonder. How? Why? Sighing with relief he was grateful that it had ended. He reached his floor and the doors slid open. Stepping off, the buzzing hit him hard, as if someone had hauled off and punched him in the head. Staggering backwards he leaned against the wall. What the hell? Looking around him the hallway wasn't busy. Pushing the call button, he wondered if the elevator would provide him salvation again? The doors slid open a couple co-workers got off. Greeted him as he got on. They looked confused.

"Where are you going?" he could read their lips and eyes filled with concern.

"Forgot something," he called to them.

The doors slid shut and the buzzing disappeared. Grabbing the wall, he leaned it against it for support. What the hell was going on with him? Before he knew it, he reached the lobby floor, too fast for his taste. The door open, three people got on and selected their floors. He selected the top floor. When he reached it, he waited, and the elevator was called down.

It was almost an hour riding up and down the elevator, when security came on and nodded to him.

"Mister Miller, how are you doing today?"

"I'm fine Ross."

"Glad to hear it. Umm, is there a reason you're not getting off the elevator?"

"Just wanted to ride the elevator this morning."

Ross nodded and heaved a big sigh.

"How are you feeling Victor?" Ross asked.

"I'm good. How are the wife and kids?"

"They are doing very well thank you for asking. You know you are one of the few people that ever ask me about my family."

"I like hearing about them."

"I appreciate that." He cleared his throat. "I hate to ask you this. But are you hearing anything strange?"

"No, nothing. Should I be?"

"No, no just had a fella last week, ride the elevator all day long because he said it kept the bees away."

"The bees?" Victor knew exactly what he meant.

"Yeah, the poor guy was hearing a buzzing noise."

"What happened to him?"

"We had him checked into the hospital and it was just a nervous break down. Once he received the medical attention he needed he fully recovered."

"Fully recovered?"

"Yes, he's back to work and doing well."

"Is there a lot of that happening?"

"What?"

"People having what did you call it nervous breakdowns?"

"Not that I have noticed."

"There was a guy on the bus this morning. He was tranquilized and physically removed."

"Oh, I'm sorry you had to see that. I witness that a few times and it is disturbing."

“Thanks for understanding. The elevator just felt quiet and safe.” Victor sighed. Knowing all too well he was going to have to get off at his floor.

“If you do hear the buzzing noise just come talk to me, okay Victor. I will stay with you until you feel better.”

“Promise?”

Ross nodded. “Yes, I promise.”

The doors slid open on his floor and Victor stepped off. Turned and headed down the hall to his office biting hard as the buzzing noise felt like it was deep inside his soul. Sitting at his desk, he had locked himself inside his office and put a don't disturb notice on the door. 'In a meeting. Don't disturb.'

Closing his eyes he tried to calm his breathing as it buzzing was encompassing his every cell in his body.

“What do you want?” he whispered desperately. “What do you want from me?”

There was no reply, the buzzing was a steady constant. A million bumble bees buzzing was a perfect way of describing it. Could someone or something trying to communicate with him? Why was it being distorted. Sliding off his chair he curled up under his desk closing his eyes and rocking back and forth. Please go away, he pleaded. Please just go away.

Someone was touching his shoulder, looking up he saw Ross crouch down beside him. “Hey buddy. Victor, you don't look so good.”

“I'm okay.”

“No, I don't think so. Do you trust me?”

Victor looked at Ross, and nodded.

“Come with me,” Ross held out his hand. It took a few minutes for Victor to crawl out from under his desk. When he did and stood up he looked around his office and saw Helen from the bus

looking at him. She had a tranquilizer gun pointed at him. Before he could open his mouth in protest. She shot him in the shoulder.

It was fast acting. The buzzing died away into a tunnel and the room went dark.

Blinking awake, he found himself in a hospital room. Everything so pristine and white. The only noise was the beeping of the monitor he was hooked up to.

A nurse entered, "hello, welcome back Victor. How do you feel?"

He croaked, "where am I? What happened?"

"You weren't feeling so well. Your co-worker found you slumped over at your desk in your office. They called 911 right away, thank goodness they did. It seems you had a mild heart attack but everything is working fine now."

"A heart attack?" he croaked.

"Yes, do you remember?"

He looked at the monitor and then back at the nurse. For the life of him he couldn't remember anything. "No."

"Well, you're doing better today. It won't be long before you are well enough to go home. Here drink this medicine. It will help keep your heart strong." She smiled and pressed a cup against his lips.

He drank it down and asked, "What day is?"

"Oh don't worry about those things right now. We only need to worry about getting you strong, and back on your feet."

His eyelids felt heavy, and he couldn't keep them open, soon he was dreaming, dreaming about someone trying to reach out to him, to warn him but he couldn't remember what or who. It couldn't be that important. At least he hoped it wasn't important.