Collectors
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Chapter I

White noise started to mix in. Nathan nervously tapped a tiny metal tin behind his right ear a couple of time with his finger. He doesn't know what tapping does and how it works, but soon, white noise fades away. He gets clear hearing back again. He cursed to his old electric nervous systems created and implanted into his nervous system by a company that doesn't exist anymore. That means technical support was officially shut down long time ago, and that also means he has to let his body be treated by a uncertified technician if the noise problem keeps happening. Fortunately, it wouldn't be tonight. Maybe tomorrow, but that concern was not on the of his priority. He had more urgent matter.

He looked around the street he was walking down on. It was a new and energetic part of town a few miles away from his accountant office. A metro track he'd been following were extended further down. The street is full of young people. Unlike Nathan, they don't have any exposed metal piece on their body. It is an old fashioned way to replace your body parts with electronic and mechanic organs. It was once considered to be a casual way to improve your body function with low risk. Most of the people of Nathan's generation had their body, at least nervous system to be smarter and cleaver, replaced with this new technology. It seemed to be not only a good idea, but also sustainable way to improve functionality until the company, who developed and popularized the technology once only used for rehabilitation, went bankrupt due to a massive earthquake hit their headquarter and data center. The company once was the internet giant and was expanding its ambition to improvement of human species was gone in one morning, and large number of people who implanted artificial body parts lost their mechanic. Nowadays, people rather modify their DNA directly, than take a risk to implant metal pieces that potentially would cause problems without frequent management.

After a few years of absence in management, those of whom implanted the electric nervous system had started to hear something. It was sound with patterns, but for whom that doesn't know what it is, it was no more than noise. There was no one to analyze or to solve the problem, because the maker did not exist anymore. People had been driven crazy by constant noise that seemed to be unable to stop. Massive suicides were committed. Instead of following them, some people tried to figure out about the unknown sound by themselves, and it turned out that what they were hearing was data left at a space by people. Any kind of data, such as messages, e-mail attachments, social network entries, sensor values, were for some reason bounded at the place where they were transferred to the air, and the electric nervous system somehow were picking them up and delivering them to your brain in the form of sound. However, although now they have more knowledge about it, it didn't solve any problem. They still didn't know why it was

happening. People were still struggling with constant noise, and Nathan was one of them. Ever since it happened to him, his health, career, personal life had been on steep decline. And now, he feels he is facing the most significant descent in his life ever.

Earlier in the morning, he found out he was missing a very important file from his cloud storage. It was a file contained one third of his customer information. As an experienced accountant, he knows that missing the file means much more than losing one third of his profit. He was silently panicked for a second – he didn't want his colleague accountants to know about this – and tried to concentrate on figuring out what was really happening. It was the file that he had been working on in metro on the way to work. He double-checked if the file was successfully uploaded to the server. Did somebody hacked in my tablet and hijacked the data? That would be possible. But who? For what reason? Well, there could be millions of reasons. Accountants are not the move beloved kind of people.

Then he realized that it wasn't the most urgent question. How do I retrieve the data? I didn't even downloaded the file on my tablet to work on it. The file just evaporated. He felt it was absurd to say that he 'dropped the file somewhere'. But that's what happened. He lost it like he lost a wallet. He sighed and mussed his hair. He couldn't concentrate. Something was really disturbing him – the noise. The office was full of massive data noise. He thought he was used to it, but it really started to irritate him. He hysterically banged his ear, even though he knew it doesn't help at all. Fucking noise. Now it's just completely ruining my whole life.

Then he realized something. He had had to listen to the damn noise that file makes all the time when he was working on it. It had its unique sound of irregular beep. He remembered it. He could actually remember sounds of all the files that he regularly use. He didn't know what part of the files make all those different noises, but one thing that was clear was that he knew the difference. When he hear it, he was confident that he could tell it was the file. He can recognize that damn irritating noise! He immediately grabbed his jacket and rushed out of the office. Then he ran down to the metro station that he walked out earlier. As far as he knows, his tablet was transferring the file to the cloud server the whole time he was working in metro. There must be fragments of files remaining spread throughout the metro track from his home to the office, and he must be able to find them.

Nathan held his urge to run, and carefully listened to the noise. He had never listened to it with this concentration. It was a strange scene, that a man in his forty slowly walking down on the street without paying any attention to the front. He kept being bumped into people, but he relentlessly moved on. He thought it was ironic he was desperately counting on something that practically was wrecking his entire life. Then he heard something familiar. It didn't sound entirely same, but it certainly had distinguishable traits. It must be the part. He immediately pulled out his tablet and picked up the data. He looked into it, but all he could see was a monitor full of computer codes. It needed an serious engineer to clarify whether it is the file. Hoping that it was the right part, he kept searching more pieces following the metro track.

After about an hour of search, as picking some more parts, he found out something unusual. There was a person drawing his attention. He was seeing a guy in black suit

nervously tapping a metal tin behind his ear and carefully walking down the same direction of the street as Nathan had been coming – just like him. Nathan immediately realized that the black suit man was on the same task as he was. He was also picking up data from the street. Nathan felt confused. This was a specific method that Nathan just came up with by himself. He thought as he was walking. Who is that person? Am I supposed to be bothered by him? WHAT IS GOING ON?

Then he noticed that he had had not been picking up any piece of data for two blocks now. Something wasn't right. There was supposed to be my data on the ground here. Nathan intuitively sensed that the black suit man was collecting the same thing as well. He was still walking further ahead of Nathan. They were both after the same piece of data. He rushed to follow this man, and he could't hear any fragment of his file. This guy must have been picking up my file. He is the thief. Or an accomplice of the thief.

At the moment when Nathan finished planning to dash and punch him and was about to execute it, the black suit man disappear into an alley. The alley connected to the part of town that was known for active illegal organizations. It is a dangerous area. And Nathan, an educated accountant, had never been to such an area. He hesitated. He needed the file so badly. Also, unconsciously, he was realizing that it was the moment that he could turn this coursed noise hearing into something else. Something that could mean significant change not only for him but also for his entire generation. What would the makers of my nervous system say if I tell them that I hear data sounds through their old product? They would say it is some kind of a silly joke. He smiled bitterly. Nathan followed the thief and disappeared into shadow of the alley.