

Moe sat in the straight-backed wooden kitchen chair, elbows on the
 A rushing, hissing, unending stream of intelligible and
 stained kitchen table, hearing. Many other people in Moe's same position-
 unintelligible data assaulting and informing,
 the position of occupying a one-bedroom flat in a huge, run-down complex in
 unneeded, unheeded, but ultimately
 an area of town that had never been good-would be listening. Moe however
 resolutely,
 was way beyond listening; he had transcended to hearing. And try as he
 heard.
 might, he couldn't stop.

Deep at night, with the insomnia which created unrest, and unrest
 Downstairs, Sam threatens
 which created insight, Moe first began to notice the acuity of his hearing.
 to finally kill the bitch.
 The neighbor's fighting ceased to be a blurry mumble; soon the threats
 Through the drain
 became both clearer and more terrible. And the televisions which
 muffled pleading
 surrounded his sepulchral apartment blared 24 with programs that held no
 echoes from the porcelain.
 interest for him but which he heard never the less.

The wall booms under
 The various exercises recommended to him by his psychologist did
 the thump of matted hair.
 little to quiet the Pandemonium surrounding him and coursing through his
 The door slams below,
 veins. Moe rolled over in his riot of pillows clutching one to each ear,
 perhaps at last
 resolving that when the sun rose he would seek the help of a proper doctor.
 unhinged.

"That I can see, Mr. Corti, your hearing is normal for a 42 year-old
 With age comes wisdom and the painful reality
 man; you have neither a deficit nor a heightened sensitivity. I did notice a
 of mortality and motive.
 build-up of cerumen, though. I'd like to take care of that."

Simplicity ceases and complexity ensues
 "Cerumen?" Moe asked.
 with the knowledge that you can neither forget nor undo
 "Ear wax, Mr. Corti. It can interfere with your ear's ability to drain,
 what you know your body and mind to be capable of.
 resulting in a painful infection."

Once you realize, it's too late,
 "Will it make me hear better?"
 it's there and you'd better deal with it

"Well, yes. Impacted cerumen will prevent your ear from conducting
because it won't go away.
sound to its fullest potential."

Ever.

Moe couldn't believe his ears. "Haven't you heard a word I've said, Doctor?"
Moe held his hands to his ears. "Hear no evil. Don't you get it? I'm hearing too
much, it's driving me crazy. I can't sleep: I can't work: it never stops. I want you to
turn it down, not turn it up."

"Mr. Corti, there's little I can do. Your tests show me that there's not a prob-
lem with your hearing. Perhaps you might try ear-plugs."

Moe sat at the kitchen table, looking at the utensils laying quietly on
The auditory conscience, the malevolent mastoid
the padded plastic mats. Twisted deep into his ear canals were two
are two of our autonomic functions which cease
neoprene plugs, held in place by fists of cotton covered with surgical tape.
never to operate. They function like the heart
He liked the suffocating pleasure of the silence at first, but his ears soon
or a shark-
acclimatized and slowly, insidiously the noise began to creep back in. He
to stop is to die.
held his hands to his ears and tears began to well in his eyes. He heard the
You can ignore it, temporarily, but with knowledge
tap, tap, tapping noise they made, and felt their cool splash under his
comes awareness and no hope for escape.
forearms as they struck the placemat and exploded.

"Mr. Corti, I haven't any explanation as to your heightened sensitivity."
The dream of blanketing silence
The Audiologist peered at Moe over his glasses and across his desk. Moe
like a damp dampening fog ushered in
stared at the huge plastic model ear on the corner of the doctor's desk. "The
by a soothing, silent ocean.
only suggestion I might make, although it seems a little extreme, is to
Tacit, slow water quilts the planet-saline and silent.
consider wearing some OSHA approved ear protection."

Dark, murky, and mysterious, like quiet
"What's that?" Moe brightened at the possibility of some soothing
the less you know, perhaps the better,
quiet.

cradled calmly in the enveloping nothingness
"Oh, perhaps ear protectors like those worn in industry-like shooters
thinking only occasionally of
wear at the gun range."

sharks.

Moe that this was a fine idea indeed.



Oblivious to most of the attention paid him, Moe did notice his
 Increasingly isolationist, urban solitude
 super, Sal, eyeing him suspiciously. Sal was a detestable and noisy man,
 is difficult to achieve;
 given to fits of screaming at the neighborhood children for playing near
 it's not the anonomie which is the enemy
 the apartment property. He had hair on both his chest and back; he forever
 it's the noise and nosy neighbors
 wore two articles of clothing: a too-small, sleeveless undershirt and a
 which supplants seclusion.
 Greek fisherman's hat. As he pushed past Sal on the concrete steps, Moe
 You don't rent an apartment
 considered that Sal was neither Greek nor a fisherman. Sal for his part,
 you sublet your privacy.
 considered the Moe, or 36D as he called him, was going nuts.

Everything you do is known
 "Afternoon, Corti." Sal eyed Moe curiously.
 to few and many, those who need not know.

"Hello, Sal." Moe continued up the steps.

When you brush and when you flush
 "Listening to the ball game?" Sal maneuvered to prevent Moe's
 passing.

or if you do
 "I'm sorry?"

and what's your favorite program.
 "The ball game. What are you listening to?" Sal pointed to the huge,
 Doesn't anyone read anymore?
 green plastic cups which erupted from Moe's head like twin tumors. The
 That's a quiet pastime
 large padded head band squashed his ball cap and made him look like a pilot.
 whose time has past.

"Nothing. I am trying to listen to nothing."

It matters little
 "Some of the neighbors have been asking me..."

for in the absence of silence
 Moe turned and headed for the door, leaving Sal and his incessant
 there is little to do
 yammering on the steps.

but hear.

Roaming up and down the arctic aisles, Moe was uncomfortable and
 Choices: maddening and perplexing
 lost in the cavernous warehouse. The 60 foot ceiling dwarfed him, the
 disguised in indecision
 choices bewildered him. He eventually stopped on aisle 27, closed his
 amid the cacophonous din

eyes and tried to achieve isolation in the maddening echoes.

of babies and blue-light specials.

"Can I help you?" a voice fairly screamed from somewhere behind Moe.

Hope, silent blinding hope

He spun, instinctively, nearly toppling over in the process. He blinked

looms large on the horizon

and sought to regain his balance, which he did only by grabbing the bony

-the solution-hidden, unknown

shoulder of the pimply-faced teen-aged boy in the polyester red vest. Moe

exists simply because you believe it must

readjusted his ear-muffs which had become dislodged during his pirouette.

therefore you never stop

"I said can I help you?" the boy screamed again.

like hearing or the shark;

"Shhhhhhhh!" Moe held his finger to his lips. The boy blushed with

you cruise remaining close to the bottom

shame, and leaned forward, conspiratorial. He waited to know Moe's

avoiding, evading, eluding all contact

secret. "I'm looking for quiet. Absolute quiet."

until you perceive the possibility of purpose

The boy looked perplexed, then realization dawned across his ruddy

then you pounce

face. "Aisle 85-I think we have just what you need."

hoping at last to prevail.

Fascinated by the lulling blue patterns Moe luxuriated in the numbing

Wanted: SWF

near-silence for what seemed a very long time. He could still hear the

Age: 35-50

occasional car alarm or backfire, a siren now-and-then; these sounds crept

Coy, placid, demure, even bookish

through the glass. But with a sigh of great relief he had disassociated

must cherish quiet and seek solitude.

himself from much of the world. A faint thumping noise came from the door.

for possible relationship

The peep-hole-now covered-was of little use, so he opened the door.

It was

Sal.

Mr. Corti, I've been knocking and calling you for five minutes! Some of

involving long, deep, meaningful

the neighbors were complaining about banging last night and I-" Sal stopped

knowing glances

in mid sentence. His mouth hung open and he stared past Moe into his

apartment.

and little conversation.

Everywhere he looked, every surface except the floor and including



Peaks and valleys

the ceiling was covered with the repeated peak and valley pattern of blue,
 repeating patterns in blue
 egg-carton styrofoam.

an attitudinal color scheme
 Sal stammered. "Mr. Corti, what have you done?"

for the man who has nothing.
 "I have effectively reclaimed my privacy."

A padded cell
 "You WHAT?"

for a man and his thoughts.
 "I have sound-proofed my apartment." Moe stood in the doorway,
 Few intrudes, fewer escapes
 wearing his boxer shorts and the sort of athletic t-shirt so loved by his
 thoughts, utterances (which is which?)
 superintendent, Sal. On his head were the green, OSHA approved ear-
 bounce off nothing
 protection tumors. For all intents he read Sal's lips, something for which he
 sad, dead echoes
 had developed a knack.

of things unsaid.
 "Well, the owners, they'll never go for this. You can't do this..."

Conversation becomes circular
 "I have done it. I can't take all the noise, Sal. It never stops; I don't
 loopy, looping, and unending cycle
 sleep. I had to do something."

of ever-decreasing concentric circles
 "But Mr. Corti, I'm telling you..."

the stone leaps from the water
 Moe closed the door on Sal, who began to pound and yell again. Moe
 the circuit is complete
 found that if he stepped back from the door several feet, with the ear-
 0 becomes 1
 protectors, that he was deaf to Sal's attacks.
 the synapse arcs.

The patients in the Audiologists office shifted uncomfortably in their
 To achieve total objectivity
 chairs peering over their People magazines at the strange, quiet man in the
 requires great patience
 corner. The patients were all elderly, or children, and their mothers. These
 and terrible sacrifice;
 latter were careful not to permit their young ones to stare at the
 The quest for that which you truly
 disheveled, unshaven man in the plaid jacket and huge, green earmuffs
 desire
 stretched across the nylon novelty cap bearing gold silk-screened letters

declaring:

is unavoidable.

I'm not deaf,
I'm ignoring you

Like gold, it's there all along
"Ma, what's wrong with that man?" In her attempt to repair her little
waiting to be discovered,
monster, this mother had failed to impart any social grace onto this child.
refined, and perfected.

"Shh, honey, shh. It's not polite to talk about strangers," thinking she
And like precious metals
had never seen anyone stranger than this, and she would like to know what,
it contains no value
indeed, was wrong with him.

other than that which you impart to it.
Moe stared past them, at the serene impressionist canvas on the wall,
Commitment,
golds and blues, a forest he thought, and how it was perhaps the quietest
terrible, irreversible,
picture he had ever seen. He smiled vaguely.

bridge-burning commitment
The receptionist tapped Moe gently on the shoulder. He jumped.
is the final ingredient
"Mr. Corti, I said the doctor will see you now.
in the refinement.

In somewhat less-than-convincing ear-side manner the doctor said,
The world can be divided into
"What can I do for you today, Mr. Corti?"

roughly two parts,
Moe sat on the table, his legs dangling like a child's above the floor.
no matter the subject of your division
He removed the big OSHA muffs and said, "I think I've finally solved my
Ultimately, there is
problem, Doctor."

the divisor, and there is
The doctor rummaged among his instruments on the stainless tray. "I
quotient.
thought we agreed there was no problem," he mumbled perhaps a little
Those with a deficit
irritated.

seek to be whole
"I took your advice, and I've been cleaning my ears regularly, you
and those with a surplus



know, flushing them with warm water.”

seek relief.

“That’s good, Mr. Corti. What can I do for you today?”

a burden is

“I have also been adding certain agents, and I managed to increase the

a blessing

power of the flushing mechanically, with my water-pik. It’s ideal.”

to those who lack vision

“Mr. Corti, that’s dangerous. What agents?”

but total consciousness

“I think the problem has resolved itself nicely,” Moe said, looking out

and resolve

the window.

and rest

The doctor the realized, with some alarm, the quality to Moe’s voice.

is achieved

It was-out of focus. He moved toward Moe with his otoscope, looking down,

when you step forward,

he saw a white bottle in his jacket pocket. The doctor removed it, a bottle

undaunted by the distance

of Drano. The doctor tugged Moe’s earlobe, activated the light, and peered

-forever is a long way down-

inside.

knowing not

He recoiled, unprepared for the purple, ruddy landscape which greeted

what’s in the water

him. Cracks ran the length of the canal, like Death Valley’s floor and puss

but leaping, mindful

oozed here and there. At the end of the canal, past the second turn, where

of the cruising sharks

the tympanic membrane would rest supported by its red veins and vibrating

into the inky, blue

visibly in response to sound was a black crater, beyond which lied the naked

void.

inner ear

“Mr. Corti, what have you done?” The doctor stood back, his hands

shaking.

Moe studied the doctor’s lips carefully. “I have come, at last, to a quiet place.”