

Five doors of perceptions: 4. Hearing

by mazaher

December, 2011

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hearing, noun: 1. *the faculty or sense by which sound is perceived.*
2. *the act of perceiving sound.*

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Sherlock

Have you heard

That silence where the birds are dead, yet something pipeth like a bird?

JAMES ELROY FLECKER (1884-1915), *The Gates of Damascus*, 11-12

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John's hearing has always been quite keen.

At nine, he followed the almost inaudible whimper of Harry's Westie puppy to the cupboard into which she'd snuck, fallen asleep, and remained trapped.

At twenty-four, while visiting a flu patient as an unspecialized GP with no experience to speak of, he correctly diagnosed Ebstein's anomaly of the left-sided tricuspid valve --complicated by atrial septal defect-- by hearing alone, catching telltale vibrations from what other, more qualified doctors had previously dismissed as a mere murmur.

In Afghanistan, it was to him that his comrades turned, eyes hazy with sleep and wide with anticipation, when some noise outside their tent woke them in the night.

Back home, he makes tea like no one else, because he can tell when the temperature is right for the type of tea he's making by how the water sings in the kettle.

He lives with Sherlock now, and he likes to listen.

Sometimes, Sherlock seems surrounded by a chattering of birds. His words have a tendency to shoot out of his mouth like rounds from a FN Minimi on adverse. But on the other side of his voice, John can hear more: a jumble of all the sounds of the world, too bright and messy for Sherlock. The wall of white noise they melt into, coldly stifling, confusing.

Underneath, a deadly silence.

He has been witness to how he can drown in silence.

That must be the reason why Sherlock is so intent on breaking it-- wrapping himself in work, setting up complicated experiments, shooting calligraphy at the walls. Starting a nice row with Anderson or Donovan or, if he's desperate, with Lestrade. Playing his violin for John; plucking at it when he's alone.

Or turning on the subtle, bloody music of cocaine.

Silence haunts the dark corners of Sherlock's mind, where emotions live their secret, wild life. Where Sherlock never goes.

Even when John is making him come --in his hand, in his mouth, around his cock, or inside himself-- only a hitch in Sherlock's breath marks the peak of his pleasure.

John knows that it doesn't mean Sherlock isn't feeling it.

He will shake himself afterwards, blink. Talk about checking on the Petri capsules with human collagen he left heating up in the dishwarmer under the oven.

John will purr, throw an arm around his waist, nuzzle for a moment, and let him go.

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John

...e adesso

*che ho imparato a pescare con le bombe a mano
che mi hanno scolpito in lacrime sull'arco di Traiano
con un cucchiaino di vetro scavo nella mia storia
ma colpisco un po' a casaccio perchè non ho più memoria.*

FABRIZIO DE ANDRÉ, *Coda-di-Lupo* (1978)

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John is out of tune.

Sherlock knew as much even before he turned to look at him, that very first evening at St. Bart's. The sounds he made gave him away. The lame steps, painfully asymmetrical and yet determined. Like an Amati violin making its living as a vulgar fiddle in the hands of a street beggar, and still trying its level best to sound like heaven on earth.

From that moment, Sherlock has been bent on tuning John back to perfection.

His first move has been to make him run. Every toddler knows that running is easier than walking, just as Pachelbel's *Canon* is tougher to play well than *La Campanella*. Nothing is more difficult and more taxing, for muscles as well as mind, than holding a steady pitch on a slow cadence, or --even harder-- on a single, poised note. For people as well as for horses and for violins, balance comes easier in movement. When they were catching their breath after the chase, laughter rushed forth from John like a cascade of fast scales, tight and exact in its exhilaration; contagious. The sound of victory.

But there would be ups and downs.

John's tuning was perfect when he took aim and shot the cabman across windowpane/dark void between/windowpane. Later, his step wove an exact rhythm around Sherlock's as they marched off to dinner together. But the notes had unraveled all over again by the time John's legs almost hitched on the steel railing Sherlock, in his haste to ask Wiggins' help in finding Dzundza, had jumped without a thought.

There are good days and not-so-good days. On the really bad ones, John's breath will come out as the slightest of groans when he hauls the grocery bags on the kitchen counter. On a really good one, maybe when they've found the right pulse while making love, Sherlock listens to John's body and everything is as it should be. Isochronous, symmetrical, softly flowing, and pitched just right.

He always knows when, because John will begin humming to himself. He doesn't seem to be aware of the habit, something Sherlock secretly finds endearing.

"You're smiling your other smile," John said the first time Sherlock slipped into his bed without being asked. "The one only your violin and I get to seeing."

"It is because your both sound good," Sherlock answered. "Between silence and noise, there is your music."

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Notes:

To my shame, I know absolutely nothing about playing a musical instrument, including tuning it. As I wrote this, what I had in mind was something Angelo Branduardi once said at a concert, quoting (I believe) Andrés Segovia: "A guitarist spends half his time tuning his guitar, and the other half playing it out of tune". I hope there are no horrible blunders in here. If there are, please let me know how I can fix them.

Other things I know next to nothing about:

Ebstein's disease and its symptoms: <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/903579-overview#a0112>. A GP in France diagnosed a friend of mine much like John does in this story. Major, successful surgery ensued.

The FN Minimi machine-gun and "adverse" setting: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FN_Minimi.

The verse I quote from *Coda-di-Lupo* is accompanied in the original track on the LP by repeated stratters of drums like rounds from a machine-gun.