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The Beehive

Last night I dreamt that the humming stopped. I know the humming, the spinning, and the whirring all sound the same, but the humming is what lasts forever. And last night in my dreams it stopped. The humming stopped and I sat in silence. Which is odd, because the humidifier in my room was on and that thing never stops. That thing hums—no thrums—constantly and the thrumming sounds just like the humming, the spinning, and the whirring. This came to mind while I was dreaming, embedded in silence.

Whether I liked the silence or not, I couldn't say.

We notice the presence of sound but not the absence. The fridge groans on and on and on, humming and thrumming all day but when it goes off we don't notice. *It's too quiet*, that's what they always say in the movies right before an ambush. Quiet is bad news. But still, people crave the quiet. They crave it so much that they don't notice when the fridge shuts down or when their laundry is done. They don't notice when the rain outside has halted, or when their baby has stopped crying.

I had a friend once, she had a 3-month-old baby. Every night the kid wailed. Wailed on and on until the crying became just another constant in her life, another hum she tuned out and slept through. One night the baby stopped crying. She said in retrospect she had noticed, she noticed in the sense that she got a better sleep that night than she had in weeks. When she woke up midmorning the next day, that was when she noticed the quiet. Every day for the past three months she'd woken up, remembered the crying child, fed the crying child till the crying subsided then waited for the crying to begin again. Now there was no crying. No crying, no wailing, no hiccuping, sometimes there was hiccuping, when the poor boy had worn himself out too much he tended to hiccup, that's what she said my friend, there should've at least been hiccuping, but there wasn't any.

She found the boy's crib empty. She found the crib empty and the window open. She told me that when she went to the window, when she pressed her hands into the sill and looked out at the woods behind her house, she almost jumped. But instead of jumping, she cried. She sat down in the rocking chair in the corner of the room and cried. Her husband heard her crying and rushed into the room. He shook my friend by the shoulders and yelled at her, "What are you doing? Where's Johnny? Where's Johnny?!" and my friend stammered and cried some more and continued rocking in the rocking chair. Her husband finally called the police and her crying slowly subsided, only to begin again later in the day.

It is all the same. Humming. Spinning. Whirring. The world has become a beehive, shrouded in sound, bursting inside and out. Humming. Spinning. Whirring. But these are not the only sounds. These are the constants. There are other noises, sharper ones, ones that clink. When a penny gets caught inside the vacuum. Shoving the quarters into slots at the laundromat. The glass bottles of beer and cream soda clashing as my mother loads the fridge. These sounds come fast, like gunshots.

Someone's toddler is throwing a tantrum in the laundromat. Crying, yelling, screaming. Snot running from her nose and dribbling off her chin, mixing with the tears and staining freshly cleaned clothes. She curses with her small toddler mouth and high toddler voice. She pounds on the machines, she kicks over the baskets. The mother folds her arms and tells the girl to stop.

I watch from the other side of the building. Counting my quarters and listening to them clink, clink, clink into the

machine. Measuring out blue liquid detergent. The college girl next to me has tide pods, she's making a video for Instagram or snap chat, captioned "first laundry day". She narrows her eyes at the toddler screaming in the corner. I imagine that the girl's tantrum is ruining her video, that she wants the humming, spinning, whirring sound of the machines to be present in the background, but all she can get is this little girl dropping the f-bomb.

The mother starts counting down from ten.

"Fuck you, I hate you." The little girl yells, her words filled with little girl malice. I can hear her inhale ragged breaths, the kind of breaths that only come after crying.

The mother gets to three and the little girl kicks over a stranger's basket. The mother grabs her by the waist and tucks the toddler under her arm. She leaves some quarters for the stranger, throws a bright yellow laundry bag over her shoulder and leaves.

The college girl smiles and returns to her video. An old woman across from me mutters—"At least someone has control of their kids these days."

I pour out the detergent, slam the lid shut, and press start.

Sound touches every part of me, the air vibrates against my skin, it pushes up against me in bed, when I'm cooking in the kitchen, standing in line at a coffee shop. It takes up any and all space.

I am drowning.

I am standing rooted in a field, and the field begins to flood. Water bleeds into my sneakers, soaking my socks. My fingers prune first, like they do in the tub, but then other parts become waterlogged, and I am soon a floating mass of rubbery diluted skin.

I am drowning