

# Siren

*by* Katrina Dessavre

There it is again, that noise. That low hum that I know so well now, spinning, gaining momentum in my head, like a cyclist in a velodrome, until its steadiness and roundness becomes sharp, painful, cutting like glass.

I want to catch it, cup in between my palms, and squeeze squeeze squeeze until it disintegrates into silence.

I close my eyes and listen for the regulars: the Woman With The Annoying Laugh, the Dog That Won't Shut Up Because Its Owners Left It For The Evening, and the Really Bad Cello Player.

But all I can hear is barking, toddlers shrieking, dishes stacking, voices murmuring, and the Noise.

It's quieter than the rest, almost imperceptible unless you're listening for it.

At first I thought it was the building itself, a big apartment block, with my windows facing a shaft and amplifying every sound like an echo chamber. But the Noise is too inconsistent to be electrical, ebbing and intensifying at irregular intervals and unpredictable times.

I keep track. Yesterday: 6:34 to 7:18. The day before that: 9:55 to 10:03. Today I mark 11:33. That's the latest it's ever started.

It grows louder with each spiral, scraping the inside of my head, making my spine quiver out of tune, until I feel a sour taste in my throat and rage wipes out any last traces of patience.

I walk up and down the back staircase to find the floor where it's coming from, standing and listening in front of each apartment until I'm sure I have the right one. I consider knocking, leaving a note, going back downstairs to tell the doorman, when I notice the noise has an undercurrent of melancholy, an insistent pleading.

My fists unclench and the vice holding my temples softens. Part of me, the disciplined part, goes back downstairs. I handcuff myself to my couch and throw away the key. But I don't have handcuffs, or

anyone to give the key to once the noise (now a song) stops, so I open the door, left unlocked like an invitation.

The place smells of seaweed and wine left out in the open. Cups scatter everywhere, bottoms crusted a dark green. Souvenirs line the windowsills: sea shells, feathers, scented candles, driftwood dampening in the steam that fills and fogs up the room.

The song gets louder as I walk deeper into the apartment, now accompanied by running water. Just as my shoes announce a tile floor, I stop. When I see two slashes on a violin-shaped back, scars puckering at the edges, I realize that the melancholy, the pleading, that low hum is really a cry of pain, of longing for something lost.

