

NOISE

A Writing Exercise

BY Amy Norton



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Abbey pulled into the parking lot of her office, the sound grating in her ears as the tires of her five-year-old, Chevy sedan rolled against the wet, fine grains of gravel coating the asphalt, and took her customary spot. She checked in her side mirrors, angling each downward and producing a low hum that accompanied the whining of the mechanism behind each, to make sure that she was well-spaced within the demarcation lines of the spot. Nodding to herself, she reset the normal placement of her mirrors, noticing the slightly higher pitch of the humming as the motor moved them in the opposite direction, and turned off the engine. The emptiness of the air following the sudden cessation of the rumble of the engine left her feeling tingles in her bones as the vibration died away. Leaving the ignition switched on, she pushed the buttons to lower her windows. The same hum sounded, lowering in pitch as the windows lowered. She repeated the operation with her back windows and lifted her pack of cigarettes and lighter from the convenient cubby of the door-pull next to her.

The fast scratching noise of the opening cardboard of the pack, the clicking flick of the lighter and the whisper of the flame kissing the end of the cigarette were all subdued by the sound of the beginning of rush-hour traffic on the busy highway barely 100 yards from where she sat. Dump trucks and other large commercial vehicles rumbled heavily; the sound mixed with the lower whines of the smaller vehicles. All of them pulled a whisking rush of sound with them as they passed, getting louder and then fainter as each approached and passed away.

The rain of the night had stopped and left the damp chill in the air of early autumn. With little or no smog left in the air, every sound came to her with a crispness that made them sound closer than they actually were. Abbey closed her eyes and leaned her head back on the head rest, lifting the cigarette to her mouth. Taking a deep pull on the cotton filter and hearing the crackling of the fire on the end as it consumed the tobacco, she inhaled deeply. Even the smoky air traveling down her throat and into her lungs then back out made a whispering sigh. She grimaced as the humming in her ears became discernible again.

The humming was constant, a messy conglomeration of all the collective noises in her world that never seemed to stop. It was sometimes louder and sometimes quieter, depending on the ambient noises that it was comprised of, whether they were current or common or absent at the time. Most times, she was able to mostly ignore it as long as she was concentrating on something else. Work or play or chore or a book or movie, anything could distract her. The problem with this was that she

could never seem to fully relax. The moment she tried to meditate inwardly; the humming assaulted her. The quieter she made her surroundings, the more intrusive the humming became. Sometimes, it made her cry.

Abbey finished her cigarette and put the windows back up. Turning off the ignition switch, she removed the keys and grabbed the strap of her bag. Stepping out of her car, standing and shutting the car door behind her, she thumbed the button on her keys and heard the click and beep of the car locking. The sky above her seemed to be blearily gaining light, the dark blue color low in the east smearing into the blackness westward. Approaching the door, trying to ignore the sound of her boots making a muffled crunch with each step, she lifted her keys and let the little electronic keychain on it signal the door to unlock with a buzz. She pulled the door open and stepped through.

The thickly padded carpeting and the semi-sheer draperies on the windows muffled all the sounds of her movement. Her face scrunched slightly as the humming became unignorable. She walked past the reception desk and took the first turn to the right. Following that hall all the way to its end, she turned at the last left. Following that hall until it opened out into a kitchen, she punched the power button on an instant coffee maker. The display blinked silently. She heard her exhalation of relief as the sound of the water being heated inside the device hissed and gurgled at her. She turned her back to it and continued on down the hall to the second door on the right.

Glancing at the window behind her desk, she noted the light coming through the window. Once dawn began, the process generally progressed rapidly. A few early birds swooped by the window and made chattering noises as they flew by. She clicked the switch on the wall, turning on her office light. Making her way to her desk chair, she went through the process of starting her computer and the programs that she would need throughout the day.

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

Hi everybody. This is the result of a moment of uncertainty about how to approach a scene I was contemplating in my then-current main project. I like to give myself sensory prompts to develop use of sentence construction that focusses on thorough immersion in a scene. As you might be able to see, I need the practice. This short exercise is just about three years old at the time of posting in late 2019.

I save nearly everything I write and occasionally I come across one I had forgotten about. That is what has happened here. I thought it might be nice to show how even when you have “writer’s block”, if you love what you are doing, if you love the process, you can still make progress, even if it is lateral progress.

℘ Amy