

MY DOCTOR ASKS IF I HAVE BEEN UNDER A LITTLE STRESS LATELY

BY MATTHEW DORRELL

Everything is so goddamned loud these days. It wasn't always this way; there wasn't always this constant and tremendous racket. Cellophane, for example, is much louder than it used to be. It crinkles underneath greedy fingers with such an all-pervading dissonance that I wonder if over-packaging is actually the demon that environmentalists have been telling us it is all along. I can no longer eat pre-prepared foods or anything that involves any type of plastic wrap (foil is also bad). I am wasting away.

Why is everything so goddamned loud these days? The television is unbearable. The high-pitched tone which accompanies the colour test in announcing that a station has concluded its broadcasting day is so intense that windows for a square mile around my television set are in constant danger of shattering. As is my patience. My sanity.

Crickets are evil incarnate.

Footsteps make me uncomfortable to the point of occasional dry heaves. Have you noticed this, how loud footsteps are? One foot crashing into the floor, with the inevitable other shoe always about to drop. Why can't people sit down? And without the fidgeting please.

The cracking of knuckles now sounds like gunshots (I have never heard an actual gunshot, but I own a TV). I will sometimes involuntarily throw myself to the floor, arms cradling my head, terrified that I am about to be, or have already been shot. People chewing their fingernails fill me

with hatred so intense that I must immediately leave the room so as not to give in to various murderous, yet creative, impulses. I am, after all, a people person.

Blinking now sounds like a hardcover book being slammed closed by a junior high student who would really rather be grabbing a quick puff before heading into the mall than be sitting in class staring at a math text. Did you know that the average human blinks an average of eighteen times a minute? I did not. I do now. How well I know this now.

To actually and intentionally slam closed that hardcover book would be an act of barbaric violence akin to a declaration of war. And if someone were to follow through? If a war were started? The earth-shattering blast caused by the first gun fired (I have seen guns fired on TV, remember) would level buildings, mountains and historic monuments which had previously withstood the grueling test of passing ages and eras. These crumpling buildings would create yet more noise, more waves of sound, beginning an unstoppable chain reaction. These waves of angry (well, wouldn't you be?), destructive noise would only continue to increase in magnitude, eventually gaining so much power and audible momentum that they would birth a sonic boom of astronomical volume and force. The existence of existence itself could be threatened.

Everything is so goddamned loud these days. How well I know this.

So I answer my doctor: "Yeah. Maybe a little."