

## **Samuel Valovič - The Deafening Silence**

The only emotion running through my body as I come to, sitting in my car in the middle of a misty street, is shock. I get my bearings before quickly escaping the burning vehicle and assessing the scene in front of me: a truck crashed into my car. I don't question how I'm still alive and able to stand at this moment, nor how I'll pay for the repairs, but why the driver of the truck is nowhere to be seen. He couldn't have run away. Anyone with a bit of humanity in them would have already called for help. What's stranger, however, is the fact that there aren't any ambulances parked on the road. There are no medics trying to help the injured, there are no firemen dousing the rising flames, and there are no pedestrians watching from the sidewalk. It is at this point in time that I realise: not only can I not see anyone, I cannot hear anyone either. Or anything. I look at the burning vehicles, but I can't hear the fire. Not even the wind. Just my thoughts, and silence. It scares me. I don't know what's happening, I don't know what to do. I try to cry out. I can feel my mouth opening, but I hear no sound. What does this mean? I touch both of my ears, but there is no blood and no pain. In fact, when I think about it, I haven't felt any pain since I woke up in my car. Am I dreaming?

As I ponder the events which took place during the past few minutes, I realise I may not be alone after all. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot movement in a nearby alley. I cry out again, not sure of what, if any, noise I made this time, and head in the direction of the vague shape that I had noticed. However, as I enter the alley, I cannot see anyone ahead. It's quite narrow and long, so whoever it was couldn't have run the other way, no matter how fast they are. Either way, I continue down the dark path. When I finally arrive at the other end, I am greeted by a sight I've never seen before, despite living in the same city for over twenty years: A large, old and decrepit gothic cathedral, with broken windows and one of the doors open, while the other is shut, serving as a wall for a clipboard that was nailed to it. I walk closer and take a look at it. It's a patient report from the asylum in Arkham, Massachusetts. Most of it, including the patient's personal information, has been scratched out or redacted, but from what I can gather, the patient started hearing strange noises as a result of an accident, as well as forgetting events that happened since the accident every time they sleep. What I wouldn't give to hear a single sound, this silence is making me go insane.

I see the movement again, this time in the cathedral. Is there actually anyone there? Or is my mind simply telling to go inside? I enter the old building and slowly make my way

towards the main altar. The interior seems even larger, almost as if it isn't meant for humans to occupy. Huge chandeliers hang from ceilings at least a hundred feet high. Massive pulpits adorn the sides, and the main altar sits atop a raised platform that I have to climb to reach. I take another long look at the entire interior and the altar, but the figure is once again gone. I'm starting to think my mind really is playing tricks on me. I'm completely alone, there's no one else here. Just me, shrouded in silence. As my mind returns to reality, I start losing hope. There's nobody here to help me. I don't even remember where the nearest hospital is, and I don't want to spend the rest of my existence looking for it. I collapse on the floor and start to sob. Or, rather, I would start sobbing, if I could actually hear myself doing so.

But as I am slowly accepting my fate, there is a pound. And another. More and more, louder and louder. It takes a while before I realise I'm actually hearing something, but not long before I find out it's the only thing I can hear. I can't hear my footsteps, my voice, or anything else. Just the constant, neverending pounding. As happy as I was to hear a sound again, that happiness quickly seemed to turn to regret, and I fear it will soon turn into madness. I must find its source. I pace round to the back of the altar, and discover a staircase that leads down into the depths. I follow the path, finding myself on a beach, with the ocean in front of me. There it is. Somewhere deep below the surface. Pounding. Calling me to join. My body wants to go further, but my mind cannot go on anymore. I pass out, collapsing onto the sand.

I wake up in a hospital bed. How did I get here? What happened? I don't remember anything. I believe there was some sort of accident. The room is empty, save for the bed and a few tables. As I stand up and walk around the room, I notice a clipboard on one of the tables. As I start reading, I'm left in a complete shock: it's a patient report, and at the top, I can see it's from the asylum in Arkham, Massachusetts.