

The Problem with Listening

We have this planet, which we call earth; we spell it EARth, so it relates to the ear, to speaking and hearing. There's this other planet called EYEth. And that relates to the eye and the visual. So there are two worlds and I grew up on EARth. Now, I am on this other planet, EYEth, a world where all these possibilities are open to me. – Mark Morales

A Hearing Man and a Deaf Man happen to walk into happy hour at the same time. Only two barstools are open in the whole joint, so they are obligated to sit together. The Bartender asks, “What’ll it be, boys?” The Hearing Man wants a gin and tonic, the Deaf Man points to the phone – actually he points to the bottle of Jack Daniels behind the phone. “What’s with your friend?” “Him? Dunno, don’t know him.” The Deaf Man insistently points again, “I think he’s deaf” the Hearing Man guesses. The Bartender, confused, “Then what’s he want the phone for?” The Deaf Man waves his hand and shakes his head (translation: never mind). He points to a deceivingly vintage metal sign over the Bartender’s shoulder. “Miller Lite kind of guy?” The Deaf Man nods his head and his fist for emphasis (translation: yes, yes, yes). He wanted a draft but is given a bottle. A handful of stale minutes pass, the silence between them feels obnoxious so the Hearing Man asks the Deaf Man if he has a wife, a son, a dog. The Deaf Man points to his wedding band, pulls his hand outward from his stomach (translation: wife—pregnant) and cradles his arms while smacking his lips, making kissy noises to the empty space where his future son or daughter will sleep (translation: baby). The Deaf Man signs the question back by only pointing to his barstool neighbor with his eyebrows up (translation: wife—son—dog—you—have?). The Hearing Man hollers, but the Deaf Man notices no difference in the decibel of his voice: “Did you just ask me if I was pregnant!?” The Deaf Man looks at him, eyebrows slanted; confused, open-palmed hands bobble at his chest (translation: what?). “Forget it. Want another drink?” His fist nods again (translation: yes, yes, yes). After five rounds the Hearing Man says to the Deaf Man, “My hangover in the morning is going to be hell. One more drink then I’m done.” (translation: morning—tired—headache—finished). The Deaf Man points his thumb and pinky back and forth between himself and the Hearing Man (translation: me too). “I’m going to head home” The Deaf man nods, points towards the door, nods (translation: now—home—go). The Hearing Man says “Funny, this pidgin of a language we have working here.” The Deaf Man signs *bird*, fingerspells *P-i-g-e-o-n*, signs *funny—what?* They leave together, but go separately, back to where they’ve come from. The Hearing Man looks back and notices the Deaf Man remove his hearing aid, hiding it away in his back pocket.