

George, Michael Selden

It was as though his brain itched. Even as an infant, George would occasionally sense a background noise in his head. He didn't have trouble hearing other things at the same time, so it wasn't really sound, but it filled his head, and once the noise started it wouldn't go away for an hour or two. The internal scratching kept coming back, and it grew more frequent as he got older. He asked his mother about it a few times. He complained about the itching and wanted to know if she felt it, too. But every time he asked she looked sad and a worrisome frown would appear between her eyes. The silence that followed was uncomfortable, and she'd talk in whispers when discussing him with his father. This was more disturbing than the noise, so he stopped mentioning it. The next time she asked, he denied anything was wrong and she looked a lot happier.

When George reached the auspicious age of ten, he began to see the disturbance, too. It appeared in the air around him, along the surface of the furniture and his toys and the food he ate and the car, and even on the people around him. This visual noise accompanied the other sensory noise in his head. It wasn't as though the things he saw changed in any real way. They still felt the same way when he touched them, and their shape didn't alter. It was just a kind of faint, almost transparent haze painted on the surfaces he saw—like the pixelated images he'd see on his computer when he zoomed up too much to look at details only to find that the actual information on the picture was less than he'd known. But the resolution of the world didn't really change; he couldn't feel the seams where the pieces of the world fit together. He guessed that these visual artifacts had been there all along; he'd just been unable to see them before. Maybe his eyesight was getting better. When the noise in his head faded then so did the odd visual distortions.

These distractions of perception came and went over the next two years, and they began to interfere with his ability to focus—in school, while playing, or even just talking to his friends. Then one day, while at bat in a baseball game, the noise came at an inopportune moment and he was struck by the ball. It didn't stop or fade that night, so George sat in his room—in the half-dark stillness—and tried and tried and tried to make it all go away. Tears ran down his cheeks and George was beginning to wonder how he could live this way. He stopped concentrating so hard and happened upon a way of shifting his mind into an almost meditative state. This allowed him to control the noise.

From that time on his life was easier. He could stop the noise when he wanted, but he also found that he could trigger it to start, too. It became stronger, more defined, and eventually George found that he could just begin to feel the seams in the world. That's when his life really changed.