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## Unheard

by Sue Hitchcock

When he tripped in Compton Drive, it looked pretty disastrous, blood was pouring down his face and there seemed to be some teeth on the kerb. The teeth were fortunately only bridgework replicas, but the dip in his nose looked like a break. Still the emergency department fixed it with a few stitches.

After the initial shock, he began to enjoy the cosseting and pampering, using his convalescent status to do nothing until his wife began to get concerned about his ability to walk. He hadn't injured his legs but had lost his nerve to walk along uneven pavements without tripping again. Practice made perfect, but he was still anxious about the proximity of passers by. Physically he was well again, but sitting too long was beginning to waste his thigh muscles. Getting up from his chair was a struggle.

How wonderful to be alive, he thought, but why does it have to hurt.

It was as if he had spent his life, waiting for old age. At last his wife had nothing better to do, than to take care of him. At first she would ask him to do little things like reading the electric meter or changing a lightbulb, but he either couldn't see, or couldn't reach and in the end she bought a step ladder to do it herself. Better still with the risk of covid contagion, he now could prevent her from talking to anyone else, neighbours, delivery men, though only by nagging her into conformity.

One day on their walk along the narrow path by the golf course a dog walker was approaching. In order to avoid breathing in the virus the man might have been carrying, they found a corner a little off the path and waited for him to pass. The dogs visited them but the man did not pass. His wife looked out to see why not and said loudly, "he's just standing." Which provoked him to move on. When he neared he said he was unwilling to disturb the golfers who were about to tee off. They had to pay a lot of money to play golf.

His wife was annoyed to be subordinate to golfers and answered, sarcastically, "shame!" Her husband did not hear, but she told him about it when they got home. The extraordinary rage he felt, that his wife might have provoked an angry fight between the two men so he would have to defend his wife's honour, resulted in two days of silence between them. She was supposed to look after him, not get him into fights.

Still he needed her and peace resumed thereafter. He could have her ear all to himself and she could argue with him, but he couldn't hear now he was so deaf.