

Rosi Lalor

Sign Language

There is the noise of children on the swings, and two dogs barking, and traffic. All of these sounds fade, until there's just me and you and no sound. It might be better like this. It means everything will happen in slow motion.

I reach up to my throat, and make a choking gesture. There is no way to speak, none at all. There is a hook in there. It's invisible. I make a hook shape with my finger to indicate exactly what it is, exactly where it is. I trace a piece of string with my fingers. It reaches all the way across to the hook at your throat, like a washing line.

Now it's your turn. You open and close your hand, imitating the muscles of your neck, collapsing. The look on your face tells me how hard it is for you to control them. There is a hook piercing the centre of your voice. I think that it would be nice, in a way, to see some blood, as evidence.

You look down at the ground, and I watch you. You find a line of ants carrying crumbs, and a pink glove in the mud. You keep on looking for things to look at. Meanwhile my hands get restless. They start searching for something. They search my pockets, and my body entirely. They are looking for my keys maybe, or my heart, or a pen.

Bill Trüb

Grace

She loves only two things more than me: a gold dog called Oprah and a medicine cabinet. As a young girl, she conquered whooping cough, but her throat is still full of gravel. She grinds out sentences like 'Nothin' ain't never easy,' 'You don't know what I've been through,' and 'I don't deserve this shit.' Freckles splatter her face, an early Pollock.

She relies on clouds, names them, insists they're ancestors. Cumuli—wide-hipped and jovial—are paternal grandparents; wispy and thinly veiled, cirrus clouds are definitely from her mother's side. No, she's not crazy; in fact, she studied psychology at university. During the day, she answers calls at a crisis center. Strangers dial from mobile phones, threatening to freefall from bridges, and she always knows what to say: buoyant, inflatable phrases that cushion the jumpers just before they crack the frozen river.

Her name's Grace. We collided at a 24-hour convenience shop this morning, 2:30am. We turned into the medical supplies aisle at the same time. I was buying condoms, being optimistic. Bundled in her arms were a bottle of aspirin, *Hello* magazine, a bag of razors. She looked like she always does—like she'd been crying. 'Do you know what it's like to have a pocketful of sleeping pills in a city that never sleeps?' she barked, folding herself into my peacoat. 'Actually, yeah,' I said, but her question was rhetorical and she wasn't listening.

We moved to the checkout counter and she crawled into her oversized purse, spelunking for her wallet. All she could find were a pashmina, a browning banana, and fingernail polish. As the cashier silently judged her, I swiped my debit card for both of us, but Grace had already thundered through the automatic doors into the shaky streets. When she finds her wallet next week, she'll pay me back in promises and we'll be even.

Renyi Lim

Flight

I still ask myself if I could ever lose you. Then again, did I ever really try?

You made me sever myself from everything you touched. Shielded by mist that matched the white of a bridal veil, I fled to a pocket of the world tucked between looming mountains and glass-calm fjords. At night, stretched across a deckchair, I watched shadowed clouds encase the stars; in my mind, you faded to almost nothing.

One evening, my landlady came to the door. 'There is a letter for you,' she said. I knew the writing on the envelope. With pebbles for eyes, I paid her to burn it.

The train took me into the mountains through tunnels where the light flickered like an old movie reel, until the air was so cold that it hurt to breathe. I sought my reflection in sheets of ice, marvelled for hours at water so undisturbed that I became confused between object and image, and which side of the mirror I belonged to. If I lost myself, you would never find me.

Then, in that candlelit village with one telephone, the stationmaster called me over: 'There is a letter for you,' he said. Nine hundred metres above sea level, you could still touch me. And so down you dragged me, all the way back to square one.