

Burnab

by Kirthana Ramiseti

Lise started making up words when she lost her voice. She would sit in her bed, the pale yellow covers pulled tight around her shoulders, and silently speak nonsense, her lips forming words like *loquaton*, *bwab* and *yerksan*.

This happened after weeks of frustration, weeks of letting smug, unblinking doctors prod and probe her before declaring that there was absolutely nothing wrong with her. Each time she heard the prognosis of "fine" or "good health," her thin face would redden, imploding with the rage she could not express. How could she be okay if she had no voice to tell the overpaid MD's to fuck off?

Forced to take a leave of absence from her teaching job, Lise spent her days at home, dazed and unshowered, simply willing her voice to return. Her brain was a prison of trapped, angry thoughts. She cursed and swore in her head until regular words no longer seemed good enough to communicate her aggravation.

So Lise began creating new ones, first with her voiceless lips and then on paper. She wrote long lists of words, taking pleasure in creating them and imagining what they meant. Her bed was covered with lined yellow paper from her husband Carl's legal pads, her words meticulously lined up in rows on both sides of each page.

The first word Lise made up was *burnab*, which the word that came to mind when she thought of Carl. He was like the fit of her mother's wedding dress, respectable but unflattering. She silently groaned each time he came home and checked on her, his shoulders in a perpetual shrug, his Frankenstein forehead creased with deep wrinkles.

A month passed without the return of Lise's voice. She

commemorated this unwanted anniversary by chucking her spoon at Carl during dinner while he was droning on about his day, spewing out words with so much waste. Then she stormed off to her bedroom and began listing all of all the ways Carl annoyed her.

The list started out in English, noting his moronic love of the Three Stooges, his fat fingers, his junkie sister Deidre whom they had to bail out of jail three times. Soon the words blurred into nonsense. The words "bad fashion sense" became bad fastun siance, until the rest of the page was filled with nonsensical words. They were harsh, made up of blunt consonants and hard-edged sounds: *kivrub*, *zadzit*, *gablak*. And they made sense to her.

Lise dropped the notebook and buried her head under her pillow, despairing that she was losing her mind. Panicked, she began her bedtime custom of attempting speech. Rose. Sick. Purse. Cloud. Fire. She mouthed these words, futilely attempting to coax her voice out of her throat as if poking a stick into a bear's cave.

She tried letting out a scream, but also she heard was the ragged panting of her own breath.

Then Lise tried to say *burnab*.

And her voice slid out feebly, a tiny melodic whisper, but nevertheless her voice. She was so startled to speak that she jabbed her elbow in Carl's side, who by that time had gone to bed and was snoring beside her.

He didn't wake up, so Lise said it again. Burnab. It came out a little louder and much more clearer this time. Lise tried to say her own name, then Carl's, but nothing.

But she was able to say *jamjung* and *squanitsh* with ease. All night long, she talked softly in her new language, giddy at being able to

hear herself speak again. Lise kept making up words so she could continue hearing her voice, and once in awhile threw in English words and even a Spanish word to catch herself off guard, but with those words she was voiceless.

What's wrong with me, she thought. How is this possible?

