

I. Glossary

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word class: one size fits all

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silence

II. Prologue

There are a variety of unique languages one can learn. Many chose to start from childhood for longer exposure time and to utilize a young mind's ability to absorb languages. Each tongue is characterized by specific skills, which require dutiful polishing, especially for non-native users.

Unlike most, the language of silence is universal.

I speak it. My mother speaks it. My father. My brother. Strangers. Close friends. We all brandish it like a tool, our savior when exchanges become too harsh, our weapon when we indulge in passive-aggressive interactions. To acquire proficiency in this language, experience and practice is the optimal route. I heard somewhere that shadowing a speaker is a tried-and-true method of improvement.

Luckily, I am eloquent in the intricacies of silence.

III. Uses

- a. Do you live with a wolf? You know, the one who jumps at other people's throats, snarls at the slightest quarrel. Like overcast skies on days before tropical typhoons, like rapid waters entering riverside houses during floods, the wolf looms, permeates, and thickens suffocating dinner tables. My brother and I, frustrations snaking in our veins, await the pounce. It speaks the voices of thunder. I am afraid of thunder, so I use quietness. We dance around each other, nights of thunder, eerie tranquility woven between flashes of light and noise and rain. I understand generational trauma. With regret, I admit to inflicting it on my brother every day. In the wolf, I see myself. In the mirror, I see the wolf. Harshness leaves legacies, burned into vocal cords. To my weak defense, my brother does it too. When one hears thunder all the time, one is bound to adapt.
- b. Mirrors are fascinating objects, both in the beauty of their surface and the unforgiving nature of their reflections. Artificial lights are deceptive objects, as they can be manipulated to an intensity that obscures some and emphasizes others. Paired with mirrors, lights distort perspective. When I look into mirrors, I find unsaid words trickling from my lips. Fittingly, there is a psychological toll to practicing my daily language. The concentrated gibberish must leave, somehow. From a small cabinet above the sink, I take out a fresh roll of tissue paper. It should be done methodically, with words removed from the left side of the mouth first. Then, all the excess on the lips. Finally, ending at the right, curling the tissue to capture venomous sentences. It must be done immediately, because it leaves a burning, heavy feeling if left for too long. After the ritual, sleep is crucial. I exit the bathroom, turning the light off behind me, enveloping the mirror in honesty.
- c. Other people employ this tongue to calm their minds. Blankness allows contemplation, understanding. Without empty spaces, they fear divulging too much. Quietness upholds mysterious airs or causes uncomfortable gazes. People say teenagers are besotted by their devices, but many of us use them to fill in vast chasms of tranquility.

Instilling silence is an intricate business. Assuming that quietness only extends to physical actions, any cognitive throb should not be an issue. So one could use digital devices for silence, feigning preoccupation. People use it a lot these days. It's a no-brainer, phones.

Bored? Phone.

Scared? Phone.

Alone? Phone.

- d. Employing various psychological techniques to practice silence leaves you hollowed out from the inside, blood replaced by unsaid words, frothing at the mouth every few nights. Sometimes, I wish I could resort to a phone. But there the wolf stood, like an overgrown vine I cannot dare cut. The phone stays tucked within folds of clothing, tissues wedged in the bathroom like shameful reminders of sinful words.

- e. Those well-versed with the tongue will know how to weaponize it. If you provoke them enough times, maybe they will teach you. A word of warning, it's a painful experience, because you master from how they use it on you. Passive-aggressiveness is twisted art.

Before it became thunder, the wolf was rain. I love rain, as long as it does not accompany wind. Rain during summer, rejuvenating dry branches. Rain before winter, melting cityscape into patterns of gray. Rain in late spring, sprinkling chilliness on moss-covered tiles. But the wolf was turbulent rain. There were moments of tranquility, forced upon the Earth. These were quickly followed by accusations, swirling like undying wind. Despite its changes throughout the year, silence was the language that always soothed its mind, because there is nothing it can do, when all it receives is silence.

- f. One day, I would choke on the aftertaste of silence. Today I stood in the bathroom. No socks, no lights. The truth stood in the mirror, and cold tiles lay under my feet. I am burning through tissue

paper faster than I can replace it. *Swipe. Throw. Swipe. Throw.* Words are everywhere on the face that resembles a wolf.

- g. If the wolf speaks the language of pain, would it be easier to cope? Would it be easier than this constant, unrelentless fear of thunder, and the softening but not soothing quality of rain in between? Using silence against noise wounds the mind. With no outlet, tissue paper is the only way.

- g. Silence is not the language of resignation. For all the ways it has been implemented as a weakness in a dominating context, silence can be the language of resistance. It is the last-minute placeholder, the most protective solution. Nothingness is strategic. In quietness I safeguard my heart.

IV. Epilogue

Many times, I wonder if teenage hormones and personality shortcomings have led to my faulty perception of my father. Is he the wolf, jumping on my family's throat every time he does not get his way? Am I the rebellious one, whose silences and closed doors are louder than explosive voices? Owing to the mysteries of silence, the unpredictable frequency of thunder, truth remains elusive to me. If you want to learn the tongue of thunder, you can ask my father. He is a native. If you want to study the language of silence, you can ask me. I may be unreliable as a narrator, but I am qualified for this.

After all, it is so simple.

There is only one word:

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