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DEAR HEARING WORLD

By **Raymond Antrobus**

I have left Earth in search of sounder orbits, a solar system where the space between a star and a planet isn't empty. I have left a white beard of noise in my place and many of you won't know the difference. We are indeed the same volume, all of us eventually fade. I have left Earth in search of an audible God. I do not trust the sound of yours. You would not recognise my grandmother's Hallelujah if she had to sign it, you would have made her sit on her hands and put a ruler in her mouth as if measuring her distance from holy. Take your God back, though his songs are beautiful, they are not loud enough. I want the fate of Lazarus for every deaf school you've closed, every deaf child whose confidence has gone to a silent grave, every BSL user who has seen the annihilation of their language, I want these ghosts to haunt your tongue-tied hands. I have left Earth, I am equal parts sick of your "oh, I'm hard of hearing too" just because you've been on an airplane or suffered head colds. Your voice has always been the loudest sound in a room. I call you out for refusing to acknowledge sign language in classrooms, for assessing deaf students on what they can't say instead of what they can, we did not ask to be a part of the hearing world, I can't hear my joints crack but I can feel them. I am sick of sounding out your rules – you tell me I breathe too loud, and it's rude to make noise when I eat. Sent me to speech therapists, said I was speaking a language of holes, I was pronouncing what I heard but your judgment made my syllables disappear, your magic master trick hearing world – drowning out the quiet, bursting all speech bubbles in my graphic childhood, you are glad to benefit from audio supremacy, I tried, hearing people, I tried to love you, but you laughed at my deaf grammar, I used commas not full stops because everything I said kept running away, I mulled over long paragraphs because I didn't know what a "natural break" sounded like, you erased what could have always been poetry (strike that out). You erased what could have always been poetry. You taught me I was inferior to standard English expression, I was a broken speaker, you were never a broken interpreter, taught me my speech was dry for someone who should sound like they're under water. It took years to talk with a straight spine and mute red marks on the coursework you assigned.

Deaf voices go missing like sound in space and I have left earth to find them.