

Finalist, Fiction

**Silence Speaks**

By Tennessee Hill

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My fingers pulsed with a red patch of flesh, mimicking my actions, marking my stupidity. My brother made pancakes for breakfast, and I, being a sweet sister, grabbed the side of the skillet to wash it for him, consequently burning the crap out of my hand. He hadn't told me it was still hot, but when he saw my burn, he started to laugh.

He hadn't heard me screech in pain, or the pan slam against the tile floor of our kitchen. He hadn't heard a single thing, ever, because my darling brother was deaf.

He brought his flat hand to his forehead and slapped it against his hairline, that was the sign for stupid.

My fingers, the ones that weren't suffering third degree burns, flew in a fit to silently defend myself. I was fierce as I scolded him for not warning me.

All he could do was take in my coded gestures and shake with laughter. His hand was shaped in a thumbs up as he pulled it away from the bottom of his chin. Not.

Then it morphed into a flat surface and he slammed it against his chest. My.

And finally, he bent his fingers, cupping the air and poked his heart, twisting it to the side, jamming his thumb into his sternum. Fault.

Not my fault is what he signed to me, still giggling.

I waved my hand at him, letting him know it was okay.

He signed to me again.

His index finger crashed into the center of his chest, a silent crash. I.

Then he gathered the rest of his fingers into a bunch, joining them at the tips and pulled away from his chest, like he was stretching a string. Leave.

He was leaving.

His eyebrows hit the boundaries of his forehead, he was going to ask me a question.

His index finger was pointed at me. You.

He bent the same finger so his finger looked like a hook. He propelled it down, toward the ground. Need.

Then his hand softened into a relaxed flat palm, it hopped away from his left palm, also flat, towards the vacant air. Thing.

He was asking me if I needed anything.

I shook my head and smiled at him. His hand spit an O and a K into the air. Ok.

I could feel it coming, my favorite sign, the one that meant so much. His pinkie, index finger, and thumb were upright, the other two fingers down. I love you. He was saying he loved me without saying anything at all.

My hand flipped up from my side and I bent my hand like his, flashing it back. I love you.

It was the same love I felt when those words were spoken, formed into verbal words and uttered. It felt just as sweet in the form of two fingers and a thumb.

He loved me.

I loved him.

And that was that.