

# reason to breathe

IRENE YOON

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

I watch the muscles in his upper arm pulse as he strikes the jagged edge of the fence. I can hear every crack of his joints and tendons as he twists and strains to split the weak corner he's found. I feel his sharp breaths as his fingers begin shaking from exertion and fatigue.

I stay silent.

I can't breathe.

But I continue to watch.

This, at least, has nothing to do with me.



"How are you feeling, Grace?" asks my coworker, as he starts inventory for the week. He offers me a bit of his coffee like he has everyday since I started working here, but I shake my head.

"I'm fine, Stan." I reply quietly.

"If you say so," he says, wrinkling his forehead. He walks to the boxes at the other end of the room, turning around briefly with a disappointed glance. "Try smiling sometime, you know?"

I don't know what to say so I choose not to respond. I pick up a box of tags to start labeling, and ignore the sudden lump in my throat.



"Anything new in your life? New haircut, new clothes, new boyfriend?" inquires Anne, my long time therapist.

"Nothing has changed, actually."

"Then why the late night call, dear? You know I don't mind, but this is unusual coming from you, Grace."

I stare at my phone, and jolt when I realize that it's quarter past 2 in the morning.

"I'm sorry. I didn't realize what I was doing. I'll come by later this week to talk to you, if you can squeeze me in." I quickly tell her.

"I'll give you a call in the morning when I have my schedule for the week. Have a good night, Grace. Sleep well." she stifles a yawn.

"Good night."



"You're one of my best customers, you know that? I need more clients like you, who value customer loyalty!" chirps Elle at my weekly waxing appointment. "Same as always, right?"

"Yes," I respond, my sweatpants already folded on the little white chair. I stare at the ceiling, glad that the the hair on my calves have become thin enough that waxing no longer hurts as it used to.

When she's done and wants to move on, I hesitate for a few seconds - something I have never done at one of these appointments. I can't explain the sudden catch in my breath or my accelerating heart.

She lifts her eyebrow at me and gestures at my underwear. I stay frozen for another second, and then slip them off and toss them onto my pants as I always have.

I continue to stare at the ceiling.