

Shen

The title 'I write her name' is written in a cursive, handwritten font. Behind it, the Chinese characters '我写她的名字' (I write her name) are displayed in a light, semi-transparent font, creating a layered effect.

A Romanian girl approaches me
 while I peruse a menu in Sibiu,
 politely asks if I am Chinese.
 When I say yes, she passes me
 her notebook, asks me
 to write her name in Chinese.

For a moment I consider
 scrawling three symbols
 and saying *Here, this is your name.*
 In this quiet town in Transylvania
 I wonder if she'd ever find out.

Her smile is seized with anticipation,
 and I ache to write her this name—
 to shape these three letters which will
 belong only to her. And in this notebook
 it will stay, a misheard whisper
 between the pages.

But in the end, I can't do it.
 I can't plant the seed of a lie
 on paper. I can't plough a crooked line
 when all my instincts to write
 want to shape something
 like the truth. So I shake my head,
 explain that it's a foreign language
 to me, too—and as she walks away,
 a little disappointment spilling over
 onto my table, her unknown
 and mysterious name drifts
 between us like final notes
 of a symphony never meant for other ears.

Shen is a poet who also works as a general practitioner in South Australia. His first collection of poems, *City of my skin*, was published in 2001. This poem was written on a backpacking trip between Bucharest and Warsaw.
