

SHÉ

Written by

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1 INT. PRACTICE ROOM - DAY 1

Fei (16, British-Chinese girl) plays a violin alone in the dark room. She plays beautifully, intensely.

She finishes the piece, smiles proudly to herself. She takes the violin off her neck. She scratches her red and irritated violin HICKEY.

She exits the practice room.

2 INT. HALLWAY - DAY 2

Three classmates wait for her outside. They clap sarcastically. Fei ignores them.

One HISSES at her and contorts his eyes in a racial stereotype. Fei looks upset. Fei walks away quickly.

3 INT. ORCHESTRA ROOM - DAY 3

A youth orchestra of 20 players is in the midst of rehearsal. Fei sits first chair, intensely focused as she plays a fast section on her violin. We can't hear her over the chaotic sounds of the rest of the orchestra.

MR. GRIMSBY (57), the orchestra director, breathes heavily as he furiously conducts. Finally, he cuts them off with a wave of his fist. The orchestra ignore him and keep playing.

MR. GRIMSBY  
(shouting over the noise)  
Stop. Stopstopstop. STOOOOOOOOOOOP.

He grows increasingly flustered as the orchestra continue to ignore him. He sprays SALIVA as he shouts. Fei's face and neck are covered in spit. She winces slightly.

The orchestra struggles to a stop. A tense, hushed silence. Grimsby shakes his head slowly in theatrical disappointment.

GRIMSBY  
We have one week. 7 days. Until the  
spring showcase. I will not be  
humiliated...again. If only the  
rest of you played like first chair  
Fei.

Fei smiles with delight. Grimsby reaches over and takes Fei's violin in his hands, tenderly caressing it. Fei sits rapt with attention as he speaks.

MR. GRIMSBY  
(reverently)  
Look at this, everybody. A Watson-  
Phillips.

Fei smiles proudly.

Grimsby looks closer at the instrument.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
No knock offs, right Miss Fei?...no  
foreign knock-offs?

Fei's eyes widen. She shakes her head slowly.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
Good, good...

Grimsby winks at Fei. He hands back the violin. Fei's smile returns, though with a slight unease.

Fei scratches at her hickey. Outside the window, Fei sees a DOPPELGANGER walk by. She jumps.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
(shouting to everyone)  
Let's take it...4 bars from the  
violin solo.

Fei's face lights up in excitement. She raises her violin to her chin. She puts her bow to string, ready to show off.

A knock at the door. Fei scowls, annoyed to be interrupted.

MEI (16, British-Chinese) walks in holding a violin case and gives a shy wave. (Physically, she looks very different from Fei.)

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
(delighted)  
A new violinist? Welcome, welcome!

Fei turns to look at Mei walking in. Her eyes widen slightly in fear. She looks to Grimsby, feeling betrayed.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
Why don't you sit here for now?

Grimsby gestures to the empty seat next to Fei. Mei walks over. She bumps into Fei's chair on the way. She sits down. Fei is forced to edge away in her own seat.

Mei quietly tunes, plucking her violin strings.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
 (shouted to everyone)  
 Chair test tomorrow!

The orchestra groans. Fei looks up at Mr. Grimsby in shock.  
 She scratches her neck urgently.

GRIMSBY  
 (smiling at Mei)  
 What better way to welcome our new  
 player? (shouted at orchestra)  
 Lower strings, let me hear it from  
 the top.

As the rest of the orchestra plays, Mei turns to Fei, smiles  
 and whispers.

MEI  
 (in Mandarin)  
 Hello! What's your name?

When Mei speaks, Fei hears echoes of HISSING behind her.

FEI  
 (terrified)  
 W-what?

MEI  
 Oh sorry! Hi, what's your name?

FEI  
 (mumbled)  
 F-Fei.

MEI  
 I'm Mei!

Mei giggles. Fei's eyes widen. She's extremely unsettled.

Mei happily greets the other violinists around her.

Mei subtly copies Fei's actions.

INT. LI FAMILY DINING ROOM - EVENING  
 A shabby run-down flat in the suburbs of London. There's a  
 "FU" calendar on the wall, unusual herbs on the counter.

Fei walks through the front door. She takes a deep breath,  
 relaxes slightly, dropping her violin and backpack on the  
 ground by the door.

She hears laughter and chatter coming from the dining room.  
 She seems confused by the sound.

Dawei (48), Xiaoyan (47), Nainai (72), and FEI? sit laughing and eating merrily at the table. The table is covered in platters of various Chinese dishes. The family is HISSING in conversation. The hissing sound turns into Mandarin.

Fei blinks hard. The Fei she sees at the table turns to MEI.

Xiaoyan, Fei's mother, sees Fei in the doorway.

XIAOYAN

Feifei! Guess who move in next door! She said she know you from school. She feel homesick so we say we treat her to a home-cooked meal!

Mei smiles widely at Fei from across the table. She waves.

Fei is stunned. She slowly walks over. She awkwardly pulls up a mismatched chair. She sits down. A pause as the laughter and conversation stops.

Xiaoyan smiles fondly at Mei.

XIAOYAN (CONT'D)

Her Chinese is very good isn't it? Feifei used to speak very good Chinese too. (sadly) But now she forget.

FEI

I didn't forget.

XIAOYAN

Then why don't you speak Chinese with us, Feifei?

Fei glares at her and doesn't respond. In sync, Fei and Mei take a bite of food and chew. Fei is disturbed. Mei GIGGLES.

The family eat in silence for a beat.

Fei absently reaches up to scratch her neck. Xiaoyan SLAPS her hand away.

Mei looks between them, slightly alarmed.

Xiaoyan looks a little embarrassed. She straightens out her shirt and sits back down.

Nainai looks at Fei then silently opens the lid of a large bowl on the table. She scoops out some soup for Fei. Three TANYUAN float in it.

FEI

I don't want this, Nainai.

Nainai pushes the bowl at Fei again, more forcefully, frowning slightly. Fei pushes it back away. Nainai frowns at Xiaoyan.

XIAOYAN

Nainai made it for you, Fei.

Xiaoyan pushes the plate back toward Fei. Fei looks disgusted into the bowl and pushes it away again. Another awkward silence around the table. Mei looks at Fei in sympathy.

MEI

I thought Fei played beautifully today.

Mei smiles shyly at Fei then takes a big bite of her own food. The conversation below in Mandarin:

XIAOYAN

(smiling)

Oh Mei! You are too polite!

MEI

No, no, I mean it! I hope to play like her someday.

XIAOYAN

You just have to practice every day, like our Fei.

MEI

Right, right.

XIAOYAN

We are very proud of her.

To Fei this conversation sounds like HISSING.

XIAOYAN (CONT'D)

(harshly, in English)

Feifei, why can't you be as sweet and polite as Mei?

Mei's face flickers to Fei's then back again.

Fei glares over at Mei. Then she angrily pulls the soup toward her. She shovels it into her mouth, grimacing horribly as she eats.

Fei CHOKES over the last one. Xiaoyan thumps her on the back. Fei swallows with difficulty but continues to look a bit uneasy, as if something is still lodged in her throat.

5 INT. PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

5

Fei plays violin furiously, angrily, as if possessed. She keeps messing up and starting over, each time with more desperation.

Finally she finishes the piece. She winces in pain as she peels the violin away from her neck. The hickey is swollen and infected, slightly green with three white pustules.

Fei looks at the hickey on her neck in the mirror. She SQUEEZES it and gasps in pain. From the pustules pop several SMALL MAGGOTS. Their heads are covered in dark hair.

They slither away quickly into the darkness. Fei is horrified. She quickly backs out the room and shuts the door.

5A INT. HALLWAY - DAY

5A

Fei walks down the hallway as several students hiss at her. They contort their eyes in a racist way.

6 INT. ORCHESTRA ROOM - DAY

6

A tense atmosphere in the orchestra room. Mei is tuning/warming up. Fei is high strung and still breathing quickly.

Mei plucks her string loudly. Fei jumps at the sound. Mei looks at her with a mixture of concern and amusement.

Grimsby slowly walks in. He takes a deep breath and taps the music stand with his baton. The noise slowly dies away.

MR. GRIMSBY

Violinists! Ready? Miss Fei, time to show us how it's done.

MEI

Um, I'm Mei.

MR. GRIMSBY

(awkwardly)

Oh, yes, yes of course. Mei, please.

Mei takes a deep breath and puts bow to string. She plays beautifully, lyrically, confidently. Grimsby looks at Mei, impressed.

The orchestra looks to Mei, impressed.

Fei's face darkens, disturbed by Mei's prowess.

It's her turn. Fei raises her violin. Grimsby cues her in with a big flourish. She begins beautifully.

Both girls play and play, equally matched. Fei looking frantic and tense, while Mei looks poised and calm.

The girls play until they're sweaty from the exertion. Battling it out. BLOOD drips down the side of Fei's neck. Fei starts to smile, enjoying the thrill of the fight. Mei grins back at her.

Fei looks down and sees a MAGGOT crawling on her leg. She jumps and messes up the piece.

The orchestra gasps.

Both girls breathe heavily, exhausted from the exertion, waiting for the verdict. Fei looks around wildly, searching for the maggot.

Mr. Grimsby is nodding knowingly. Then he looks between the two girls, slightly confused.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)

Okay, yes yes...thank you ladies.  
hmmmm Let me think. Mmmmm-muh Fei,  
I mean Mmm-fuh Mei, I mean Mei.  
Mei!

He coughs awkwardly and points randomly at one of them. Fei and Mei both look up at him in shock.

A rapid intercut of:

A FLASH OF SOMETHING SLITHERING AND GREEN

CAMERA GLIDING ALONG FLOOR (POV OF SNAKE) toward Mei

MEI GRABBING HER FACE IN AGONY.

Fei looks back at Mei. When she does, Mei's face has transformed into FEI'S FACE. Mei GIGGLES.

Fei's eyes widen in terror at the sight. She blinks at Mei, trying to make her change back. Nothing happens. She looks around but no one else seems to notice the change.



Fei breathes heavily, overwhelmed by the events.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
Excellent. Congratulations to our  
new first chair.

The orchestra clap unenthusiastically.

Grimsby clears his throat expectantly.

MR. GRIMSBY (CONT'D)  
Switch please.

Fei and Mei hesitantly switch seats.

7 INT. PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

7

Inside the dark room, there's the eerie sound of creatures moving around and a rattling noise.

CREATURE FEIS  
(chanting)  
Fffuh fei. Fei fei, meimei Mei.

SALIVA drips from the ceiling and lands on the creatures. We see one of the CREATURE'S small maggot-y body grow longer, more snake-like. Another one grows spidery legs.

8 INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

8

FEI sits with her head in her hands, face streaked with tears. She hears footsteps coming down the stairs and looks around.

MEI  
Hey, Fei, look I didn't mean to...

Fei's fists clench at the sound of Mei's voice. She leaps forward and scratches Mei across the face, digging her nails into her skin.

Mei shouts in pain and grabs her face. She has three long SCRATCH MARKS on her cheek.

Fei looks at her with satisfaction. She raises her hand to strike again. Then underneath the marks in Mei's skin, some GREEN INSECT LEGS move.

Fei is horrified. She scrambles to her feet, grabs her violin case, and backs away. Mei hisses at her as she leaves.

8a INT. DIFFERENT STAIRWAY - DAY 8a

Fei speeds down the stairs. From a distance, Mei follows.

9 INT. LI FAMILY DINING ROOM - EVENING 9

Fei bursts in the room.

The family sit at dinner again, laughing, hissing loudly. A long SNAKE with black hair sits facing away from the door. Its tail whips around violently.

XIAOYAN

Feifei! How was chair test? We met another one of your lovely friends, why can't you be as smooth and green as her?

The snake slowly turns its head toward Fei. The scene cuts before we see its face. Fei, terrified, runs out the door.

10 INT. ORCHESTRA ROOM - NIGHT 10

The orchestra rehearses, Mei in first chair.

Fei looks through the window at them, looking murderous.

The orchestra turn all together and HISS at her to the beat of Grimsby's conducting. Fei's face turns to horror.

10a INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT 10a

Fei runs terrified through the dark hallway. Mei follows.

11 INT. PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT 11

Fei stares into the mirror in the practice room, whispering to herself. She's wearing all black concert dress. She's limply holding her violin, pizzicato-ing a beat.

FEI

Muh muh muh Mei Mei Mei Fuh fuh fuh  
Fei Fei Fei.

A CREATURE WITH FEI'S FACE emerges from the darkness behind her. Then another. And another.

They are horrible, disfigured. Halfway between reptile, bug, and human. They all have FEI'S FACE.

The creatures hiss. They repeat Fei's words, then the words of Grimsby, parents. It's set to a Chinese percussive beat.

CREATURE FEIS

Muh muh muh Mei Mei Mei Fuh fuh fuh  
Fei Fei Fei.  
Knock off knock off knock her off.

Fei is mesmerized listening to them. She's fallen under their spell. She walks toward them.

Then, the door opens and a voice behind her.

MEI

(nervous, frustrated)  
Fei..? We've been looking for you.  
The concert's about to start!

Fei turns around slowly. She has a dark look on her face, almost murderous. She CHANTS along with the creatures, caught up in their rhythm.

Fei takes a few menacing steps toward Mei.

MEI (CONT'D)

Fei, look I just wanted to talk to  
you because... What's going on? Who  
are you talking to?

The creatures form a circle around the two girls, thumping their claws, legs, mandibles on the ground.

FEI

(panting)  
You. YOU. You crawled out from some  
hole like they did. You're one of  
them, aren't you? GO BACK. GO BACK.

MEI

(getting annoyed)  
I'm from Croydon.

The creatures begin to repeat Fei's words. It forms an intense echo chamber. The tempo increases.

Fei shakes her head, trying to block it out. She looks around at the laughing creatures.

FEI

(terrified, desperate)  
No! Liar! You-you're-one of them!

Fei advances on Mei. Mei backs away fearfully.

Fei pushes Mei to the floor.

Fei steps on Mei's arm, pushing down. Mei cries out in pain. Fei looks down at her with an evil look on her face.

MEI

Fei! Stop! You're hurting me!

Fei looks around at the chanting creatures, getting louder and louder. She covers her ears.

MEI (CONT'D)

You hear them too, don't you Fei?

Fei looks back at Mei, shocked.

FEI

W-what?

MEI

They say terrible things, don't they?

Fei seems uncertain, tormented.

She STOMPS down.

Then a terrible CRACK.

The creatures gasp.

MEI (CONT'D)

Fei...

Mei sits up, she looks unhurt. We see that what Fei broke was her own violin.

MEI (CONT'D)

(softly)

They say such terrible things.

Fei looks at the broken pieces of the violin. She starts crying.

The girls are silent for a long moment before Fei asks:

FEI

How do you know...(desperately) how do you know??

Fei scrambles quickly over to Mei. Mei flinches slightly. She pulls her hair away from her neck, revealing an old and scarred VIOLIN HICKEY.

Fei stares at Mei's hickey scar. She recognizes herself in Mei.

Fei reaches out slowly and softly touches Mei's mark.

She moves her hand up, grabs Mei's face and PULLS. It looks like a moment of violence at first, but then the FACE comes off attached to a FACE-HUGGING SNAKE which is HISSING in anger.

Fei looks down at the SNAKE in her hands, at her own face staring back at her. She looks at the disgusting creatures around her, all of them screaming and spitting at her.

She realizes it was her all along, her anxieties and insecurities projected onto Mei. Fei drops the snake in disgust.

Mei's real face is back. Fei looks at her and smiles. Mei smiles back. Fei reaches a hand out to her, and the two girls stand up together.

A beautiful note sounds and the REPTILES start to melt. They smile as they disintegrate into green slime. Soon all the reptiles are gone. All that's left of them is their bones. Two of the skeletons are perfect BONE INSTRUMENTS, shaped like Chinese traditional instruments.

11a INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - NIGHT 11a

Fei and Mei run laughing through the school corridors.

12 INT. CONCERT STAGE - NIGHT 12

In slow motion, Fei and Mei run onstage. They are covered in grime, holding hands, laughing, HISSING TOGETHER, carrying their new bone instruments.

FEI  
(in mandarin)  
Congratulations on the solo, Mei.

MEI  
Let's play it together!

FEI  
(smiling)  
Are you sure?

MEI  
Yes!

The orchestra members and Mr. Grimsby are seated and ready to play. They look down at them in shock.

Mei and Fei take their seats. They are laughing and tuning up their instruments.

The two girls begin to play- a beautiful, unearthly sound. The orchestra join in, accompanying them. The music turns into a joyful Chinese folk song.

Mr. Grimsby staggers backwards from them. He falls to his knees, eyes filled with tears of wonder, DROOL dripping from his mouth.

The audience cheers wildly as the music swells. Fei's parents stare at the scene in shock. Then they stand and clap, delighted. The two girls look radiant on stage.