

Fresh American Sharks

By Livian Yeh

livianyeh@gmail.com

CHARACTER

Ming Lee, Chinese American Woman, early 20s

TIME

1925

Midnight, on the shores of Angel Island. It's dark and windy. We hear a woman climb out of the ocean—splashing, audible movement. The shore is rocky, so she yelps as she steps onto it. She appears before us, wet from swimming in the ocean, dressed in a makeshift swimsuit of underclothes, her hair up in a bun. There is a pile of her belongings nearby: a makeshift towel created from old clothes, a shirt, pants, a hairbrush.

MING LEE

They say you're supposed to keep your feet up.

When swimming. I'm still learning, but—

Feet up and head down.

That's the opposite of what my mother told me.

She said to always keep my head down. To not smile—especially at men.

Shit. Shit! Fuck. It's cold.

(She puts on some clothes.)

I'm not smiling.

Not at men. There are no men at my detention center. They wouldn't even let the boys stay with their moms.

Fine with me. I hate children.

(Beat)

Don't tell that to the immigration officers, please.

I'm supposed to—

(She lets her hair down and begins drying it with the towel.)

My mother told me to get married to Hong Chang. "He'll take care of you," she said. "He owns a business in America."

An entrepreneur.

He washes clothes for people. That's his business. I'm sorry if I sound judgmental—I do judge him because I also washed clothes for people back in my village. My entire family did. Hong Chang couldn't wash people's clothes back home? He had to come here to do that?

Worse, he had to drag me here.

His wife.

The thought makes me want to vomit—being someone's wife.

But my mother thinks it's a woman's greatest destiny, to be some laundryman's wife.

I had suitors in my village, you know? Xiao Liu, the butcher, had his eyes on me. He definitely came down to the stream where I washed clothes during the day to flirt. And some fishermen.

They got real quiet when their boats passed me.

Or maybe they were just afraid of me.

I only saw Hong Chang once before I married him. He came back to our village to look for a wife. A week later, I was on a ship to America—the Lincoln—big, dirty ship full of mean Chinese women.