

CHINAVIRUS

A monologue

INT. SHIRLEY'S FLAT - EDINBURGH - DAY

An empty white kitchen, rarely used rather than pristine.

SHIRLEY (32, Scottish Chinese) drains a glass of water. Her high-end leggings and hoody are discreet and modest.

She stands on one leg and stretches the other.

SHIRLEY

The thing that got me through lockdown was running: up Arthur's Seat, down Leith Walk, along the canal. You name it I ran there. I know Edinburgh better than a cabbie now, even though I'm an outsider, a west coaster.

Changing the stretch, she repositions.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

It was perfect weather you know, bright and fresh, and the streets were empty early on. Back when people clapped on Thursdays and even Li Nainai was sending memes. When we were all in it together.

Switching to her other leg, she repeats the first stretch.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

On this one run I was coming down Lothian Road and it was weird cos there were two buses instead of fifty and every shutter was down but people were about. One woman had a thick wool grey coat on and I remember thinking, aren't you hot?

She's stretching but losing focus, loosening her grip.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I stop at the lights and I hate that, you know, 'cos you lose the energy you've built up, the stuff that propels you. Anyway, I stop and there's a couple, the grey coat woman with a blonde guy. I make sure I'm two metres away and they give me a this-space-thing-is-odd-eh smile, and then I hear a shout, a 'Hey!' from behind, so I turn.

She stops stretching and looks us dead on.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

He's close, so close I know he's a smoker, and then he spits in my face. It hits my cheek, my nose, my lips. I feel drops on my neck. Then he shouts "Fuck off home chink, before I smash your chinavirus face in". He lurches at me and I hear a gasp. It's the woman and I catch eyes with her. She's frozen. I don't know what she's thinking but I thought - this is it. This guy is serious. So I ran for my life.

Shirley takes off her hoody, revealing a sporty tee beneath and goes to the washing machine.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Down Lothian road over Princes Street down Dundas along the water past the school and police station. It was dark when I got home. Beat my personal best. Then scrubbed my face til it was raw.

She pulls damp cotton turquoise trousers and shirts out the washing machine and puts them aside. She shoves her hoody in.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

Strange thing is, I remember his voice but I don't really remember his face, because I ran, yeah?

Taking the wet clothes to a stand, she starts hanging them. They're identical. Uniform.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I remember the couple though. So I recognise them when they walk into Emergency a month later. He had a distal radius fracture, nothing serious. He'd been skateboarding. Lockdown hobby, she told me, laughing, in that same grey coat. He called me Doctor Chen, said my name right, looked me in the eye. They thanked me.

The washing is done. She faces us again.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

But they didn't remember me.

THE END