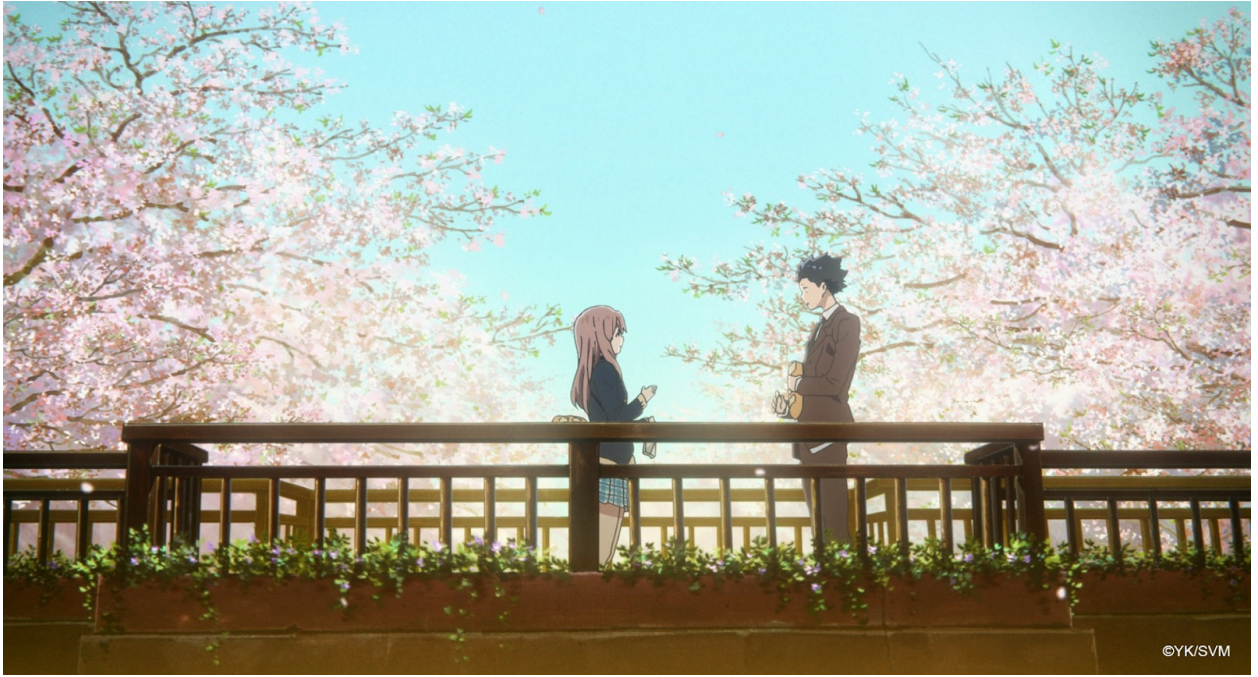


The Sound of Silence



By Scarlett Jang

"This is Shoko, a new student. Please treat her well," Mr Takeuchi said to the third grade class. The pink haired girl remained silent at the front of the class, increasing the tension in the room as the class waited for her to speak. After a few seconds of silence, Mr Takeuchi lightly tapped her shoulder and with a small jump, Shoko picked up a white and pink notebook from her backpack and began writing. At the back of the room was Shoya, Naoka and Jack, a threatening trio of students, harassing various students within the blind eyes of Mr Takeuchi.

My name is Shoko Nishimiya. It's nice to meet you.

I would like to get to know everyone through this notebook.

"What's with her?" Naoka whispered to Shoya and Jack, giggling quietly.

When you want to talk to me, please use this notebook.

"This girl's so weird," Jack whispered to Naoka and Shoya.



"She can be Piggy's girlfriend because he's blind and she's deaf!" Jack exclaimed. In an instant, the silence of the class broke, erupting into laughter and jeers. Shoko silently smiled at the class, confused as to why the class was laughing hysterically.

"Enough," the teacher demanded, silencing the class and turning to Shoko, "Alright Shoko, you can sit in front of Shoya."



Over the next few days, the students began getting to know Shoko, communicating through her notebook. New classes were implemented to accommodate Shoko's disability, such as sign

language and communication classes. During the first lunch with her new class, the students except Jack and Shoya huddled around Shoko, asking her questions.

What's your nickname? Piggy wrote in her notebook.

"That's such a dumb question, Pig-face," a student jeered.

Sho-chan, she wrote.

"Shoya," Naoka called, "she has the same nickname as you, isn't that cool?" Shoya, in the middle of arm wrestling Jack, turned to her with a foul expression. *This girl's taking all the attention away from me.* With a threatening glare at Shoko, Shoya twisted Jack's arm painfully and pushed his arm to the floor, winning the wrestle. Then, he seized the notebook and threw it, enjoying the splash the notebook made as it hit the school fountain's water.

"Let's go guys," Jack snickered, walking away. The rest of the students followed him like sheep, leaving Piggy and Shoko on the playground.

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"What's that in your ear, Shoko?" a girl named Miki asked a few weeks later. A pink object glowed in Shoko's ear, causing others to stare at the foreign object.

"Oh, my auntie told me about them. They're hearing aids right? They allow her to kinda hear what we say," Piggy blabbed, "My auntie sai--"

"Sucks to your auntie!" Jack shouted, walking up to Shoko with Shoya. Shoko smiled warmly at them. With her right hand, she pointed to Shoya and Jack, then herself and clasped her hands together. Shoya, never paying attention to sign language classes, blinked confusingly.

"Fwens," Shoko said shakily due to the lack of experience she had with talking. Shoya laughed and stared at her threateningly.

"No! Why would we want to be friends with a weirdo like you?" Shoya barked, ripping the pink object from her right ear. He looked at it questioningly, smiled, and then threw it out the window, enjoying the crack from the distance. The class stared at his actions, jaw dropped. Jack and Naoka laughed hysterically, breaking the silence. He walked up to Piggy and seized his glasses and with no hesitation, threw them out the window, following the hearing aid to the concrete.

"Deaf and blind! What a perfect combination!"



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Day by day, hearing aids and glasses were thrown out windows by Shoya. Jack, Miki and Naoka laughed at them and wrote nasty things in Shoko's new notebooks. Due to the repeated actions, Shoko and Piggy grew close as the other students didn't want to be friends with the bullied under threat of being bullied themselves. Although knowing the bullies wouldn't stop their actions, Piggy repeatedly asked the bullies to stop and yelled at them when his glasses were

taken or when he was teased. Shoko, on the other hand, remained silent and remained smiling at the bullies, asking to be friends through the only ways she could, pointing at them, pointing at herself then clasping her hands together. However, after Shoko's hearing aids were ripped out one day, blood dripped from her right ear.



"Shoko's mother called the school and apparently, eighteen of her hearing aids have gone missing or have broken in the past month. She suspects that Shoko is being bullied, although Shoko has not said any names," the principal said to the class. By instinct, eyes moved to Shoya, Naoka and Jack.

"We know it's you, Jack and Shoya," Mr Takeuchi accused, alerting Shoya.



"STAND UP!" he roared at them and slammed his fist against the blackboard. Shocked, Shoya stood up with a quiet 'yes sir.' Jack reluctantly stood up, looking as if he didn't care. Silence filled the classroom, Piggy prideful that the bullies were finally caught.

"Is this true, you two?" the principal asked. The class murmured to themselves, fully knowing the answer. Shoya said nothing and looked away spitefully. Jack still looked like he didn't care.

"Naoka," the principal said, causing a slight jump, "have you noticed anything sitting next to Shoya?"

"He may have done some things from time to time," Naoka said shakily.

"What? You teased her so much! Don't throw me under the bus, you did just as bad as me," Shoya sneered, shocked, "Miki too! It wasn't just us!" A small whimper escaped Miki's lips, causing the class to look towards the back of the class. Her light hair fell in front of her face and her head bent down. A small droplet escaped and hit the desk.

"How could you accuse me of such a thing? I never did anything," she lied, fake crying.

"You stood there and supported the teasing Naoka did!" Shoya accused.

"Enough!" the teacher demanded, "we will discuss this matter another time. Shoya and Jack, you are suspended for three weeks. Leave now."

Shoya slammed the front door open and ran upstairs to his room, angrily running up the stairs. *How could they betray me like that?* Infuriated thoughts filled his mind as he slammed the door to his room closed. The noise alerted his mother, who was on a call with the school. His mother rushed after him.

"Shoya!" his mother demanded at his door.

"What?" Shoya hissed snarkily, clearly angered from the events that occurred



"I got a call from the school saying that you harassed a girl named Shoko. Is this true?" his mother asked, her voice cracking from the sadness and shock that her son would do such a thing.

Over the next few years, Shoya caged himself away from society, viewing his new highschool as a cruel and judgemental world. His actions in primary school bit him back, causing his former underlings to turn against him. He was bullied by the students he harassed who sought revenge. After his first few months of highschool, Shoya's guilt overcame him, making him wish to talk to Shoko and Jack. Jack, on the other hand, did not care about Shoko or Piggy and instead sought revenge on them for the reprimanding he had received.

As Shoya walked aimlessly around the city one day, a flash of white hit his face, gaining his attention. *School Supplies*, the sign displayed flashily, beckoning Shoya to walk in. Inside, he saw the same pink and white notebook Shoko had in third grade. He reached for it and picked it up, feeling the awful memories from when his friends wrote nasty things in the book. *I'll give it to her when I see her next*, he thought, purchasing the notebook. As he turned to exit, an overweight highschool boy with glasses walked past him.

"Uh," Shoya stuttered awkwardly, "Piggy?" The nickname caused the boy to jump and frown at him.

"What do you want?" he replied stoutly, clearly upset.

"Do you know which school Shoko attends?"

"You better not hurt her," Piggy snarled, "I don't trust you just yet" Shoko's pink hair complimented the cherry blossoms behind her as she fed the fish in the river beside the tree. Slowly, Shoya approached her, the notebook in hand. Noticing the movement in the corner of her eyes, Shoko looked up and awkwardly smiled at him.

"Uh..." Shoya started. *Oh wait she's deaf.* He brought up his hands.

You. He pointed to Shoko slowly through his broken sign language.

Me. He pointed to himself.

Friends. He clasped his hands together. In a flash of realisation and shock, he covered his mouth with his hands and looked down quickly. *Stupid, stupid, stupid! Okay just give her the-*

Shoko's eyes teared up and she ran over to him, grasping his hands with her own.

"Yesh," she spoke awkwardly. The pair hugged as the cherry blossoms fell around them. *Why did she forgive me? I was horrible to her.* Thoughts like that filled his mind, battling the positive emotions he felt due to the physical contact.

It's okay. I'll fix things from here. I'll apologise to her and Piggy too.

I think I'll be alright.