

Tissue Packet Aunty by Genevieve Loh

“Darling, what would you like when we get to the hawker centre?” my father asked.

“Hmm... There is a lot to choose from.” Thinking about the lovely fruit scents with their colours that looked like the rainbow always brightened me up, and the strong smell of *Hor Fan*, just made my mouth water. I could not wait to get there! The tweeting of birds and the people chattering were typical of a Saturday afternoon in a Singaporean heartland. I was in the car with my father going to my favourite hawker centre. After fifteen minutes, we finally arrived.

Many people were queuing for the *Mee Goreng*. “Jennifer, do you want *Mee Goreng*?” my father asked. “Oh! Yeah!” I replied. My father went to queue for the *Mee Goreng*.

“Here is \$1, go buy yourself a drink,” he added. I clutched the \$1 in my hand and went to the drink stall. “One sugar cane juice please,” I ordered. “Yi-bei su-gar cane juice (one sugar cane juice),” said the Aunty at the stall to her companion. I smiled at her as I handed her the \$1. I carried the sugar cane juice back to the table. My father was already eating his *Mee Goreng*. “You had better eat this fast or it will turn cold,” my father said. “After this, can we have *Lao Ban*?” I asked. “Ok,” he replied.

From afar, I saw a hunched-back old lady carrying a plastic bag going from table to table looking for scraps of leftovers and putting it in her plastic bag. She looked famished, but

clearly, she did not have enough money to buy her own food. She was wearing a worn out tee-shirt and three-quarter over-sized pants. Perhaps, she could not afford proper meals and had grown too thin for her own clothes.

As she approached the table where my father and I were sitting, I noticed how thin and frail she looked. The skin on her face was sagging and she had many wrinkles on her forehead. Perhaps, she was worried when she would have her next meal. She looked at us, took out the tissue packets from her bag and said in Mandarin, “Mai ti-sue mah? (Want to buy tissue?)” She had a soft voice and her plea was desperate. I looked into her eco-bag, which was still full with tissue packets. Maybe no one had bought her tissues.

I reached into my pocket and felt a one dollar coin. I slipped it out and passed it to her. “Aunty,” I said as I shot a glance at my father, hoping that he would notice my good deed. After he saw this, he opened his wallet and took out a ten dollar note. He passed it to the Aunty. Perhaps he wanted to set a good example for me. She smiled and reached into her eco-bag and took out \$9 to hand to my father. My father gently pushed her hand away. “Xie xie! (Thank you),” she said, as she handed us five tissue packets. I watched her walk towards a stall. I could tell she was happy.

“Jennifer, let’s go to the *Lao Ban* store”, my father said. I held hands with him and walked off. I took one last glance at the “Tissue Packet Aunty”. She was eating *Mee Goreng*.

I felt glad for her.

As we drove home, I wondered whether there were more “Tissue Packet Aunties” out there. That experience will forever be etched in my mind. I realised that I should not be picky with my food choices because the “Tissue Packet Aunties” and others like her have to eat whatever leftover food they could find. After that experience, I felt that we should be more generous towards the under-privileged people in Singapore.

THE END