



SPRING 86

WIND ROW

VOLUME 4, NO. 2

A New Follower

Gurney Drive, Penang. The famed hawker stretch. It's where the rich and poor mix to share famous oriental delicacies. It is also the place where new 'followers' are born.

A dark, sleek BMW pulls by the roadside. The gentle sun is just awakening, giving out its warmth and vibrant rays. Accompanied by a smooth, gentle breeze, the twilight sea pounds a soft beat against the shore. Two persons in their late 30's, wearing three-piece business suits, step out of the car. Their sights are soon directed towards a small stall. A few persons are busily serving food just then. The customers are eating and chatting away; some are businessmen while others are common laborers. Even in the wee hours of the morning, the place is nearly packed with people from all walks of life.

"You'll love the food here, Tan. The best noodles in the whole of Penang."

Tan eyes the stall. A scornful look tells an observer, he thinks otherwise. The stall is old and in a dire need for repair; paint is peeling off its sides and metal frames are full of the familiar sight of rust. The words 'Gurney Drive Famous Noodles' are barely visible from the grease-covered glass cabinet.

"Two bowls of noodles, boss?"

An old man, clad in a torn and tattered vest comes up to the place where Tan and his friend are sitting. He smiles, showing a gap where his front teeth used to be. The old man knows that Tan is wary about the place and the food. He shakes his head thinking, they never learn that you cannot judge something because of the location it is in, do they?

Tan nods in agreement to the question. The old man shuffles off, yelling in his coarse and rough voice, "Two noodles . . . table by the roadside . . ."

Tan scans the surroundings. His face is full of regret. Dead leaves, broken twigs and cigarette stubs encircle the stall. The drain nearby is clogged up with plastic bags, bottles and containers, causing a foul stench to be emitted. A few yards away is a sign with the words, '\$500 fine for throwing rubbish . . .'. How ironic, he thinks.

Perched high up on the branches of the swaying Casuarina trees are crows, waiting to swoop down on leftovers on the eating tables. They will stay there and feast until the old man comes . . . yelling and chasing at the top of his voice. Tan squirms with disgust at the sight.

A few minutes later, the old man brings the two bowls of noodles. Puffs of steam can be seen appearing from the bowls. At least the heat will kill the germs in the atmosphere, Tan thinks. He takes a small careful bite. A look of puzzlement and bewilderment appears on his face. He takes another careful bite, this time bigger.

The food is gone a few moments later. Tan wipes his mouth and looks up. He sees the old man looking at him; a smile appears on his wrinkled lips. The old man knows what Tan is thinking; the rest of his customers were formerly like Tan. Tan returns the smile and pauses before consulting his friend.

"Lim . . . are you free tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah . . . why?"

"Noodles tomorrow . . . my treat."